THE SWORD OF GOLIATH
David in Heroic Literature

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Stanley Isser

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Acknowledgments

I have followed the debates over the life and times of King David during the last two decades with great interest, sometimes with concern over their occasional bitterness. The issues have provided wonderful teaching tools for my classes, since they involve deep and nuanced discussions of assumptions and methodologies in the disciplines of archaeology, history, and literary scholarship. In the present work I attempt to make my own contribution to these debates. I take full responsibility for any errors that readers may find in the text, and I hope that there are a minimal number of instances of scholarly naivete where I have had to rely on the expertise of others.

I wish to thank my wife, Charlotte Isser, for listening to me think out loud while researching this book, and my colleagues in the Judaic Studies Department at the University at Albany, SUNY for their encouragement, especially Professor Daniel Grossberg, with whom I have been discussing the relevant issues for years and who has offered many useful suggestions. I am grateful for the skill and care of Professor Dennis Olson of Princeton Theological Seminary, the general acquisitions editor for SBL, whose proposed corrections and revisions, based on his mastery of the literature about my subject, were always on the mark. I am also indebted to SBL's anonymous readers of my submitted manuscript, whose criticisms led me to make necessary alterations in my original. The publication has been ably and patiently overseen by editorial director Rex D. Matthews, and in the final stages the detailed work of copy editor Bob Land and typesetter John Eagleson guided my editorial efforts. I hope that the results justify their faith in this project.

Chapter 1

Introduction

The overall pattern of the canonized Hebrew Bible's narrative from the book of Deuteronomy through 2 Kings may be described as a sequence of suffering-and-redemption cycles. The first describes enslavement in Egypt and the exodus, culminating either in the revelation at Sinai, or better, in the conquest of Canaan. The episodes of the book of Judges, in which individual tribes or groups of tribes — never the entire nation — of Israel are subjugated by their foes and rescued by the actions of a "judge," are a series of minor cycles. The redactor sees them as such, framing each with a formula that begins the episode with YHWH's punishment for Israel's straying and ends the tale with a postdeliverance period of peace. The Philistine oppression and the achievement of independence under David constitute yet another cycle whose climax is the securing of peace and safety from all surrounding enemies, clearly stated in the context of YHWH's covenant with David in 2 Sam 7, which in turn enables, though not immediately, the construction of the temple by Solomon. That is the premise of the next cycle that begins with the shortcomings of Solomon and Rehoboam, leading to the secession of the northern tribes under Jeroboam I, and concludes — as predicted in 1 Kgs 13:2 — with the restorative activities of Josiah. The primary cause of the last cycle — the sins of Menasseh — actually precedes Josiah, and together with other failures of Judah and its kings, results in national destruction and the Babylonian exile. We are left hanging in the suffering part of the cycle, with only the anticipation of better things to come in the description of Jehoiachin's release from prison (and if we go outside the narrative in Kings, in the prophetic hopes for national restoration).

This account from Deuteronomy through 2 Kings is usually attributed to the writer, writers, or school called the Deuteronomist (commonly abbreviated as Dtr). Our view of the literary history of this work and the historicity of its narrative details depends on how its hypothetical sources are dated and evaluated, whether the text was produced in one or more stages, and whether the Deuteronomist is to be regarded as a compiler, redactor, or author. The story of David poses a particularly difficult set of problems. David

is an important figure not only for his own exploits, but also because his image became paradigmatic for royal messianism centuries after his own time. Amid the numerous categories of messianic hopes among the Jews of later ages, the restoration to power of the Davidic dynasty, or the appearance of a figure who was a new David, a descendant of David, or an ideal king like David ultimately became the most popular and influential.

A major component in Judaean royal messianism is the covenant that YHWH had made with David in 2 Sam 7 promising eternal rule for his dynasty. The date of this text has been much debated, with conclusions ranging from David's reign itself to the exilic period. Equally disputed are the dates of prophetic oracles and passages in Pss 89 and 132, which appear to reflect the language of 2 Sam 7. But whether the covenant is early or late, what we have is official royal propaganda and prophetic utterances whose impact on their original audiences is difficult to judge. Did people accept official statements through which the government justified itself, and did they pay much attention to the preaching of figures they may have dismissed as cranks? Could pronouncements like these alone have produced a lasting belief in a future king modeled on an idealistic portrait of the founder of the dynasty? Four hundred years passed between the time of David and the Babylonian exile. It must have taken more than official propaganda and prophetic poetry to make David such a compelling figure for so long a time. As in the case of miracle-working prophets like Elijah, old and long-lasting tales of the popular culture must have helped to shape David as a larger-than-life character, in this instance a prototypical king, in the imagination of many generations of Israelites.

The thesis of this book is that David was a legendary hero, kept alive in the oral and written folktales and poetry of Israel, who became a model of *arete* for the national culture, not unlike Achilles for Greeks and King Arthur for Britons. David appeared in this literature as a charismatic leader, the founder of a kingdom, and yet, also like Achilles and Arthur, a man with flaws and vulnerabilities. We know David, of course, only from the text of Samuel–Kings. The narrative, with components from traditions about David's early years and episodes of his later years as king, presents a series of stages in his career: anointed for a great destiny while still an unknown youth, and introduced as an all-Israelite talent: "A musician and man of valor and a warrior and clever in speaking and handsome, and YHWH is with him" (1 Sam 16:18). David became in turn a giant-slaying hero, a successful military officer, a falsely accused outlaw, a benevolent mercenary, the king of Judah, the monarch of a united Israel, and the ruler of a small empire that extended beyond Israel's boundaries. The story includes battles; a cast of powerful characters; episodes of murder, treason, jealousy, love, and

sex; and, amid David's successes, also humiliation and tragedy. The scope of this literature and the volume of details exceed that of any character or period in the Hebrew Bible.

Unless one takes the extreme and unlikely — as this work intends to demonstrate — position that Dtr invented the entire story, it is apparent that behind the canonized history of David were pre-Dtr popular traditions that would have been the real media through which people knew him. David's lament for Saul and Jonathan (2 Sam 1:17–27) is cited from the Scroll of Yashar, and probably more of the narrative comes from that text or from similar sources (cf. David's poem of lament for Abner in 2 Sam 3:33–34, quoted without attribution to a source). The battlefield victories of David and his soldiers, as well as some of his personal conflicts, recall Homeric adventures, and some are evidently prose fragments or summaries of longer tales that have been lost. (See especially the abbreviated accounts of the feats of David's warriors in 2 Sam 21 and 23.) This was the sort of popular literature that created the heroic portrait of David prior to the work of the Deuteronomist. The heroic sources cannot be reproduced, and we cannot tell if they took the form of discrete tales, longer connected narratives, or epic poetry; our task is to explore the implications of these hypothetical sources.

By way of introduction, suggestions by contemporary scholars about the categories of sources and redactional elements are here listed with brief comments. They are examined in greater detail in the next chapter.

Larger narratives: Examples include the story of Saul, the Ark Narrative, the story or History of David's Rise (often abbreviated HDR), the Ammonite wars, the Court History (also called the Succession Narrative). These have been alleged to be independent literary works incorporated into Dtr's framework, but some scholars have denied the existence of such lengthy accounts and see the narrative as a chain of independent episodes.

Legends: Best known is the David and Goliath duel, but other accounts and fragments may also fall into this category.

Ancient lists: Examples include rosters of royal officials, lists of David's heroic warriors — the Three and the Thirty. Some have claimed that this material is very old or at least based on old sources that go back to David's time or shortly thereafter.

Poetry: Examples include the women's praise of David and David's lament for Saul and Jonathan cited from the Scroll of Yashar. These fragments represent early poetry cited in the later prose account. Do they come from an "original" poetic (epic?) literature upon which the present prose narrative is based?

Prophetic material: The stories involving Samuel and Nathan have been seen as secondary insertions into the narrative from prophetic sources to

demonstrate the central role of prophets and the prophetic perspective in the history of the early monarchy.

The Deuteronomist's work: Dtr, the redactor of Samuel–Kings, has been regarded as compiler, reviser, and editor of the narrative, and by some as author of smaller or larger portions of it. Dtr is responsible for the "Deuteronomic" framework of divine reward and punishment based on Israel's observance or violation of the Mosaic covenant. Theories of multiple stages of redaction have achieved considerable influence, for example, F. M. Cross's argument for two Deuteronomic recensions, one in the time of Josiah and a second after the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C.E., and the contention of R. Smend and W. Dietrich that there were three: a historian, a prophetic redactor, and a nomistic redactor.[1]

Post-Deuteronomic additions: Examples include the poem and last words of David in 2 Sam 22 and 23. J. Van Seters considers the entire Succession History to be post-Dtr.[2]

Twentieth-century scholars have used the differentiation of the early sources from the late additions and redactional material to reconstruct the history of David's time. Such attempts range from confident use of allegedly undisturbed material — with a contention that most of the stories were collected but not revised by the redactor — to cautious evaluation of apologetic, theological, and political revisions that might have produced some exaggeration or distortion of facts. In recent decades, however, a group of scholars who have come to be associated with the term "minimalism" have taken a position against the historical value of virtually all of the sources, citing either the folkloric, propagandistic, or novelistic nature of the narratives, or their late invention by Dtr or authors of the postexilic period.

The following chapters survey the various approaches to the story of David and then focus on one in particular, the narrative as heroic literature. I hope to show that the bulk of the traditions about David come from popular stories in various stages of literary development. They are more valuable for understanding the heroic image of David and his contemporaries in Israelite culture than in reconstructing the historical events of David's time.

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1. F. M. Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973), 278ff., and R. Wilson, *Prophecy and Society in Ancient Israel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), 156; R. Smend, *Die Entstehung des Alten Testaments* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1981), and W. Dietrich, *David, Saul und die Propheten*, BWANT 7, no. 2, (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1987).

2. J. Van Seters, *In Search of History: Historiography in the Ancient World and the Origins of Biblical History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 277ff.

Chapter 2

Approaches to the Biblical Text

The Text as Historical Literature

L. Rost's influential work, *The Succession to the Throne of David* (1926),[1] while conceding that the David story should be treated as literature, insisted that at least a large part was based on historical fact. The Succession Narrative (2 Sam 9–20, 1 Kgs 1–2), "the finest work of Hebrew narrative art," may have been "artistically structured," but it was "based on actual events" and written during Solomon's reign.[2] The story's objectivity about David's misdeeds and weaknesses persuaded Rost about its basic historicity. "It can hardly be assumed that somebody would later have dared to expose David in this way without sound evidence. The most probable explanation is that real historical facts are related here, but in a strongly stylized dress. Fact and fiction join hands in this succession narrative as in every work of an artistically sensitive historiographer."[3] So sensitive, thought Rost, that the speeches in the Succession Narrative are true-to-life dialogues. The story was adopted by the Deuteronomic redactor with minimal editing, so what we have is essentially a literary historiographical document of the tenth century B.C.E.

Other elements in the history of David are also very old. The account of the Ammonite War (2 Sam 10:6–11:1; 12:26–31) is a "sober factual account" from the time of David by a God-fearing soldier, intended for the state archives.[4] The pre-Jerusalem stories of David's rise to power, however, are of less substance, and the speeches are more contrived.[5]

Rost's argument for the basic historicity of the artistically enhanced material of the Succession Narrative has been echoed by later twentieth-century scholars, whose comments have been conveniently assembled by J. Rosenberg: The author of the Succession Narrative was a "genuine historian"

1. L. Rost, *The Succession to the Throne of David*, translation of 1926 original by M. Rutter and D. Gunn (Sheffield: Almond, 1982).
2. Ibid., 115.
3. Ibid., 104.
4. Ibid., 115.
5. Ibid., 110.

(Alt); it is "historical writing . . . mature and artistically fully developed" (Pfeiffer); "something of a good historical novel" (Eissfeldt); "eyewitness flavor" (Bright); "realistic and true-to-life portrayal of people and events" (Sellin/Fohrer).[6] This position demonstrates a certain naivete. Surely historians working centuries after the time of the heroes they describe can give their stories even more vividness and seeming realism than contemporary accounts might contain. Indeed, so can writers of fiction.

Other scholars, with or without the Rostian praises for the literary quality of the text, have treated the material in 1 and 2 Samuel as based on historical fact, but more or less embellished. They range from the school named after W. F. Albright, much maligned these days for attempts to confirm through archaeology the narrative details and chronology of the biblical account, whose basic outline they tend to accept, to those who would define themselves as greater skeptics, but who also adopt the Bible's historical framework. One of the most forceful scholars of the latter group is Baruch Halpern. He agrees that 2 Samuel is a contemporary tenth-century work, but he applies the "principle of minimal interpretation" to the biblical narrative. His tendency is to accept accounts of events as historical, but he pares away to a minimum the text's exaggerated details.[7]

Source Analysis

Rost and those in his camp believed that large narrative sections like the Succession Narrative were reproduced by the Deuteronomist almost without editing, but other textual and redactional elements did creep into the text. The rest of the David story outside the Succession Narrative was a composite of sources from different periods, requiring the application of source critical methodology. To illustrate the results of this approach, two representative attempts, one from the 1960s (Fohrer) and one from the 1980s (McCarter), are summarized in chart form on p. 8. Both insist that extensive material

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6. J. Rosenberg, *King and Kin: Political Allegory in the Hebrew Bible* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 100. He cites A. Alt, "The Formation of the Israelite State" (1930) in idem, *Essays in Old Testament History and Religion* (trans. R. Wilson; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1968), 268; R. Pfeiffer, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (New York: Harper & Row, 1948), 357–59; O. Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament: An Introduction* (trans. P. Ackroyd; New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 141; J. Bright, *A History of Israel,* 1st ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1946, 1952), 163; E. Sellin and G. Fohrer, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (trans. D. Green; Nashville: Abingdon, 1968), 163.

7. B. Halpern, "The Construction of the Davidic State: An Exercise in Historiography," in *The Origins of the Ancient Israelite States* (ed. V. Fritz and P. Davies; JSOT Suppl. 228; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 53.

survived from the age of David and Solomon, and that Dtr was for the most part merely an assembler of earlier sources.

Georg Fohrer, in his *Introduction to the Old Testament* (1968),[8] posited six chronological divisions for the sources: (1) the earliest material from the time of Saul and David, (2) the bulk of the narrative from the period of David's and Solomon's reigns, (3) somewhat later passages from the reign of Solomon or the early divided monarchy, (4) a prophetic supplement on the role of Samuel from the later monarchical period, (5) a single passage by the Deuteronomic redactor, and (6) post-Deuteronomic additions.

In his two volumes for the Anchor Bible, *I Samuel* (1980) and *II Samuel* (1984), P. Kyle McCarter Jr. provided a fairly comprehensive outline of previous scholarship on the subject, as well as his own conclusions about the sources.[9] His subdivisions are similar to Fohrer's, though for the earlier material he has two rather than three periods:

1. *David's Reign.* In 1980 McCarter identified several sections that appeared prior to the prophetic revisions of the later monarchy, while suggesting that the ultimate origins of the tales were much earlier. In his 1984 work much of this is simply assigned to David's reign without further qualification. He also argued that the history of David's years as king is a Davidic court apology, not part of a "Succession Narrative" written after his death, *contra* Rost.
2. *Solomonic Period.* This stratum is limited to 1 Kgs 1–2 and insertions in 2 Sam 7.
3. *Prophetic Supplement.* From the north late in the eighth century, these additions/revisions express history from the prophetic perspective that kingship depends on prophecy.
4. *Deuteronomic Redaction.* McCarter follows Cross's hypothesis that there were two Deuteronomic redactions, one in the time of Josiah and one post-586.[10] With the exception of two short, doubtful passages, McCarter assigns virtually all the 1 and 2 Samuel materials to the first redaction. Thus the text is not only positive with regard to David, but still shows confidence in the continuation of the dynasty.
5. *Late Additions.* The two poems, David's psalm and his last words (2 Sam 22 and 23:1–7). Inserted into the narrative before the account of David's death, they parallel the two poems of Moses in Deut 32 and 33.

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8. Sellin and Fohrer, *Introduction to the Old Testament,* 218–25.
9. P. Kyle McCarter Jr., *I Samuel* and *II Samuel,* both in the Anchor Bible series (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1980 and 1984). In *I Samuel,* see 13–30; in *II Samuel,* 5–19.
10. See above, chap. 1, note 2.

	Fohrer	McCarter
Period of David	(Period of Saul and David) notices about the personnel of Saul's and David's courts (1 Sam 14:49–51; 2 Sam 8:16–18) the catalogues of David's heroes (2 Sam 21:15–22; 23:8–34) the stories about the Gibeonites' revenge and the ill-fated census (2 Sam 21:1–14; 24) (Period of David and Solomon) the account of Saul's rise and fall (1 Sam 9:1–10:16; 11; 13–14:48; 31) the story of David's rise (1 Sam 16:14–16; 18–2 Sam 5; 8:1–15) the Court History (2 Sam 9–20; 1 Kgs 1–2)	the Saul cycle (1 Sam 1; 9:1–10:16; 10:27b–11:15; 13:2–7a, 15b–23; 14:1–46). This material took shape in the northern kingdom, but was based on earlier tales. the Ark Narrative (1 Sam 4:1b–7:1; 2 Sam 6:1–13, 17–19) the story of David's rise to power (1 Sam 16:14–2 Sam 5:10) the Ammonite wars (2 Sam 10:1–19 + 8:3–8 + 11:1 + 12:25–31) the story of Absalom's revolt (2 Sam 13–20) Gibeonites' revenge (2 Sam 21:1–14) and story of Meribaal (Mephiboshet, Mephibaal), which originally followed it (2 Sam 9:1–13) census and plague (2 Sam 24) lists of David's heroes added to the text from "archival" sources (2 Sam 21:15–22; 23:8–39
Period of Solomon	(Solomon and early divided monarchy) the Ark Narrative (1 Sam 4:1–7; 2 Sam 6–7) the prophecy of Nathan, i.e., Davidic covenant (2 Sam 7)	1 Kgs 1–2. The apologetic material about Solomon's succession is limited to these two chapters in 1 Kings. McCarter rejects Rost's popular theory that most of the history of David's court in 2 Sam constituted a Solomonic "Succession Narrative." a pre-Deuteronomic stratum in Nathan's prophecy on David's intention to build YHWH a house (2 Sam 7:1a, 2–3, 11b–12, 13b–15a)
Prophetic supplement	Samuel's youth (1 Sam 1–3) his leadership and opposition to monarchy (1 Sam 7:2–17; 8; 10:17–27; 12) his rejection of Saul (1 Sam 13:7b–15ba; 15) his anointment of David (1 Sam 16:1–13) some expansion of the Goliath story in 1 Sam 17 the En Dor episode (1 Sam 28)	Samuel's career and his opposition to Saul in 1 Sam 1–15 added to Saul cycle Samuel's anointment of David (1 Sam 16:1–13) Nathan's prophecy, i.e., Davidic covenant (2 Sam 7:4–9a, 15b, 20–21) Nathan and the Bathsheba affair (2 Sam 11:2–12:24) census and plague additions, role of Gad (2 Sam 24:10–14, 16a, 17–19)

	Fohrer	McCarter
Dtr redaction	the oracle against the house of Eli (1 Sam 2:22–36)	additions to the stories of Samuel and Eli; against Eli (1 Sam 2:27–36; 3:11–14; 4:15b; 7:2ab–4, 6b, 13–17)
		kingship implies apostasy, but YHWH approves (1 Sam 8:8, 22)
		Samuel's farewell address (1 Sam 12:6–15, 19b[?], 20b–22, 24–25)
		information on Saul's reign (1 Sam 13:1–2; 14:47–51)
		some revisions of David and Goliath story in 1 Sam 17
		David and Jonathan on succession (1 Sam 20:11–17, 23, 40–42)
		David's refusal to kill Saul (1 Sam 23:14–24:22)
		additions to Abigail's speech in 1 Sam 25:28–31
		details on Ishboshet (2 Sam 2:10a[?], 11[?])
		David's destiny to rule — remarks in the Abner story (2 Sam 3:9–10, 17–18a[?], 18b, 28–29)
		additions to the Hebron coronation (2 Sam 5:1–2, 4–5[?], 12)
		addition to the rejection of Michal (2 Sam 6:21)
		additions to Nathan's prophecy (2 Sam 7:1b, 9b–11a, 13a, 16, 22b–24[?], 25–26, 29ba)
		comment in the narrative of the conquest of Edom (2 Sam 8:14b–15[?])
		addition in the tale of the woman of Tekoa (2 Sam 14:9)
		Zadok and Levites (2 Sam 15:24ab[?])
		mercy for Mephiboshet (2 Sam 21:7[?])
		Only 2 Sam 7:22–24 and 15:24ab, both listed above with question marks, are assigned, also with question marks, to the second (postexilic) Deuteronomic redaction.
Later additions	Psalm 18 (2 Sam 22)	The two poems, David's psalm and his last words (2 Sam 22 and 23:1–7). Inserted into the narrative before the account of David's death, they parallel the two poems of Moses in Deut 32 and 33.
	the last words of David (2 Sam 23:1–7)	

It is noteworthy how little of the basic narrative about David is ascribed to the prophetic and Deuteronomic strata in the systems of both Fohrer and McCarter. For McCarter, even segments of Nathan's prophecy in 2 Sam 7 are attributable to Solomon's reign, and while one version of David's refusal to kill Saul when he had the opportunity is Deuteronomic (1 Sam 23:14–24:22), the other (1 Sam 26) is part of the early stratum. McCarter does assign accounts of Samuel's participation in some of the stories and the Bathsheba/Uriah affair to the Prophetic Supplement, but Fohrer, who accepts the idea of an early unified Court History, includes the Bathsheba episode in it. Virtually all of the material that could be built into a heroic tale of David and his times is traced to the age of David himself or to the time of Solomon.

T. N. D. Mettinger's *King and Messiah* (1976)[11] provided a variation on the source-critical approach based on his understanding of the texts as Israelite and Judaean royal propaganda. The northern Israelite tradition began with two narratives from the time of Saul: Saul's acclamation as king at Gilgal (1 Sam 11:1–11, 15) and his association with an unknown seer (1 Sam 9:1–10:16). During Solomon's reign the northern tribes further enhanced Saul's claims by adding the story of his selection by lots at Mizpah (1 Sam 10:19–27). Then, after Jeroboam broke away from the united kingdom, when anointment became necessary for kingship, the northern kingdom's official tradition reworked 1 Sam 9:1–10:16 to have Saul anointed as *nagid* by Samuel. The first texts of the southern tradition, created in the time of Solomon to support his rule, were the Succession Narrative and an early stage of Nathan's prophecy in 2 Sam 7, which was originally applied to Solomon. The History of David's Rise, including David's anointment by Samuel in 1 Sam 16:1–13, was added just after Solomon's death to legitimize Davidic claims over all Israel by asserting that Saul's rule was transferred to David by YHWH, so that David, not Jeroboam, was Saul's true successor. An enhanced "dynastic redaction" of Nathan's prophecy concerning the continuation of the dynasty, which built on the earlier version of this text, was added as a triumphant conclusion to the David story.[12] Mettinger's approach is different, but like Fohrer and McCarter he breaks up the text into sources arranged chronologically and traces the basic narratives to the actual time of Saul, David, and Solomon, or shortly thereafter.

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11. T. N. D. Mettinger, *King and Messiah: The Civil and Sacral Legitimation of the Israelite Kings* (Coniecta Biblica, OT Series 8; Lund: Wallin and Dalholm, 1976).
12. Ibid., 40ff. and chart on 309.

Focus on the Deuteronomist and Beyond

Martin Noth's theory of a single exilic-period author and compiler for Joshua through Kings[13] was rejected by the theory of Frank Cross (1973), which posited two redactional stages or recensions for the Deuteronomic history (Dtr^1 and Dtr^2).[14] The occasion for the first was the Judaean revivalist movement and religious reform of King Josiah, seen as the most worthy successor of David. While divine reward and punishment for Israel's and Judah's behavior explained the ups and downs of their history, there was optimism about the future of Judah and the Davidic dynasty. The second recension, a product of the Babylonian exile, made editorial changes and added new material to explain the unfortunate death of Josiah and the subsequent fall of Judah and Jerusalem. This approach of Cross and his followers (the "Harvard School") has been very influential in America. We have seen that McCarter adhered to it in his work on 1–2 Samuel, placing almost all of the passages about David into the earlier, preexilic stratum. In Europe the "Göttingen School" of Rudolph Smend (1981), Walter Dietrich (1987), and others suggested three layers: a history writer (DtrG), and prophetic (DtrP) and nomistic (DtrN) redactors.[15] Several issues concerning Deuteronomic activity — redaction vs. composition, dating, scope, traces in nonhistorical books, linguistic identification markers, a pre-Dtr prophetic stratum — have provided extensive scholarly debate in recent years.

It is not my purpose to survey all this literature; an excellent summary can be found in Steven McKenzie, *The Trouble with Kings* (1991),[16] and more recently Raymond E. Person has surveyed the literature in *The Deuteronomic School: History, Social Setting, and Literature* (2002).[17] As that title indicates, Person has introduced yet another approach. In place of a single Deuteronomist or identifiable multiple Dtr's, Person argues for a Deuteronomic school whose work may have begun in the Josianic age but continued through the exile until the fifth and fourth centuries. The overall framework of the history was established in Babylon during the exile, but redaction continued well into the Persian period. We return to Person below.

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13. See, e.g., M. Noth, *The Deuteronomistic History* (JSOT Supplement 15; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1981) [translation of Part 1 of Noth's *Uberlieferungsgeschichtliche Studien,* 3d ed., Tübingen, 1967].
14. See chap. 1, note 1.
15. Ibid.
16. S. L. McKenzie, *The Trouble with Kings: The Composition of the Book of Kings in the Deuteronomistic History* (VT Supplement 42; Leiden: Brill, 1991), 1–19.
17. R. F. Person Jr., *The Deuteronomic School: History, Social Setting, and Literature* (Studies in Biblical Literature 2; Atlanta: SBL, 2002).

John Van Seters's study of ancient historiography, *In Search of History* (1983) posed the first major challenge to the position of Rost and the source critics on the age and historical value of the preredaction sources.[18] Van Seters argued that the real writer of history in Samuel–Kings was the Deuteronomist (Dtr). There is only one Dtr, who worked in the exilic period; later additions to Samuel–Kings were by others who did not necessarily share Dtr's outlook on history. What existed before Dtr, that is, the material he used, was not historiography and not generally good historical evidence. Dtr created a combined history of Saul and David around a major theme: that David's legitimate succession to the throne of Israel was God's purpose.[19] Saul had been specially elected, but was rejected in favor of David and the Davidic house. Samuel's prophetic role and the covenant of 2 Sam 7 are new elements central to Deuteronomic history and not older than Dtr.[20] There is no pre-Dtr prophetic supplement. Larger units such as an Ark Narrative, a story of Saul, or David's rise to power "never had an independent existence of their own."[21] The narrative blocks that Dtr employed were early stories, legends, and folktales which he found intact. But these were only small narrative units like the *logoi* that were used by the Greek historian Herodotus. Dtr collected the short "stories and popular traditions" and created the whole according to his thematic design.[22] "This redactional process — a mixture of free composition and the creation of redactional links between independent blocks of material of different types and genres — is the basis of historiography in Samuel and Kings."[23]

The Succession Narrative, or Court History, does not fit the design, since it presents David in a negative way. Why would Dtr include an old narrative at odds with his concept of David as a divinely selected ideal king? Van Seters concludes that the Court History is a post-Dtr addition not earlier than the mid-sixth century, whose events may be imaginary, certainly not reported by eyewitness accounts. It neither glorifies David's reign nor legitimizes Solomon's rule. Just the opposite — it describes David's house and Solomon's accession to be all "turmoil and intrigue" (which is why Chronicles omits it).[24] This "antilegitimation" account also serves to oppose the messianic implications of 2 Sam 7.[25]

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18. *In Search of History: Historiography in the Ancient World and the Origins of Biblical History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983).
19. Ibid., 265.
20. Ibid., 276.
21. Ibid., 355.
22. Ibid., 358.
23. Ibid., 258.
24. Ibid., 290.
25. Ibid., 289–90.

In Van Seters's view, then, very little in the story of David may be read as an original and true historical source (i.e., something derived from inscriptions, archives, or narratives whose intent was to report events). Early material employed by Dtr was mostly of the nature of legend and folktale. Even if a passage reproduced an actual piece of historical evidence, its context and place in the chronological framework are Dtr's invention. Dtr may have been a historiographer, but what he wrote was not objective history. He produced, in a post-586 setting, an artificial account based on bits and pieces of *logoi*-like traditions arranged according to a particular theme. Contrary to the popular theory of Rost and his followers, including the source critics, lengthy connected narratives from the early monarchy never existed as literary, let alone historiographical, units for Dtr to use in his work. What Rost identified as the Succession Narrative was indeed such a literary unit, but not from the tenth century. It was a post-Dtr political addition or corrective piece, the latest rather than the earliest component of the David story.

J. Rosenberg, in *King and Kin: Political Allegory in the Hebrew Bible* (1986), presented the thesis that the Old Testament in general is an educational work concerned with the Israelite political community, its nature, premises, ideals, and welfare. It makes use of earlier materials but is a late composition. The story of David, in particular, far from an eyewitness account, is a postexilic product, the result of a "carefully premeditated program of personal and national education."[26] It draws on and interprets old narratives, but these are the products of storytellers, not histories. The conceptual province of the storyteller, here applied to the adventures of David, includes "family jealousies and intrigues, seductions, betrayals, homages, allegiances, personal terrors, omissions, and excesses."[27] There are signs of folk motifs and oral storytelling, and the connected episodes form at best a novel or novella.[28]

Van Seters and Rosenberg both rejected the role of the redactor, whether the Deuteronomist or someone else, as simply that of a compiler who occasionally made editorial comments. They saw the narratives of Samuel–Kings, including those about David which are our concern, as the creative work of an exilic or postexilic *author* — historiographer or propagandist — who used earlier materials as well as his own inventions to express themes that constituted his agenda. Furthermore, the earlier materials he used were for the most part nonhistorical and represented many genres, especially folk literature and storytelling of various types.

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26. Rosenberg, *King and Kin,* xiii.
27. Ibid., 104.
28. Ibid., 107.

Person, in whose view there was no single Dtr, but rather a Deuteronomic school of long duration, also sees its redactional work as literarily creative, not merely the collection, arrangement, or copying of texts. The members of this scribal guild were responsible for "variant tellings," alternative versions of some stories. While working from sources, they added new material to enhance the tradition. The role of the Deuteronomic school as performers of tradition is based on an understanding of how writing develops in a primarily oral society.[29] We return to the importance of orality, as well as Person's theory of ongoing redactional activity, in chapter 6, where it is discussed in greater detail in relation to the development of the narratives about David.

The Question of Historicity

Van Seters and Rosenberg concluded that the larger narrative was Deuteronomic or post-Deuteronomic and that most of the earlier sources that the late authors may have used were of dubious historical worth. Anyone who accepted such an assessment would be pessimistic about prospects for reconstructing the history of David's times from the biblical material. The debate about historicity as it developed in the 1980s may be represented by a pair of historians, Baruch Halpern and Niels Peter Lemche.

In 1983 Halpern published a monograph, *The Emergence of Israel in Canaan,*[30] which was mostly about the period that the Bible describes as that of the Judges, but which also discussed the early monarchy. Halpern accepted the basic historicity of the biblical narrative. Thus, for example, he commented that the "general soundness" of the descriptions of Saul's campaigns — though less so David's — is "beyond dispute."[31] The monarchy arose because of growing ethnic sensibilities within the tribal league, pressure from the Philistines and Ammonites, and a desire to take over the Valley of Jezreel, which led to the formation of a professional army under Saul. The process was mediated by a "central or prestigious cultic establishment, formerly located at Shiloh, and represented in Saul's time by the priest-Nazirite-prophet Samuel."[32] Saul's base of power was Israelite and Yahwistic. David's was an alliance of peripheral areas against central Israel.[33] The biblical text may be grounded on solid evidence. In a more recent work

29. Person, *The Deuteronomic School,* 83ff.
30. SBL Monograph Series 29; Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1983.
31. Ibid., 8.
32. Ibid., 12.
33. Ibid., 14.

Halpern argues that 2 Sam 8 on David's victories over Philistine, Moabite, and Aramean foes is based on a display inscription set up at the Jordan River.[34]

Lemche's concern in his 1985 work, *Early Israel,*[35] was to demonstrate the nonhistoricity of the biblical account of Israel's takeover of Canaan and the period of Judges. While preexilic traditions about the past did exist, the narrative in Joshua and Judges is a late collection and adaptation of such material for theological purposes. The chronological gap between the events and the written texts is too great. Even the oldest written tradition may not accurately repeat the oral tradition behind it. Given that oral narration is geared to the situation in which it is recited, its details may distort historical events.[36] Actual history could, however, begin with David, ca. 1000 B.C.E., since the historical material in Samuel–Kings is more reliable.[37] But in his *Ancient Israel: A New History of Israelite Society*[38] of 1988 such optimism disappeared. Now Lemche characterized Dtr's account of the story of David as based on a collection of works that included the Succession History (SH) and the History of David's Rise (HDR). The former is like a novella whose intention is either to legitimate Solomon or to accuse him of usurpation; the latter is an ahistorical[39] pro-David literary composition with features of classical romance, written according to a preexistent pattern. Its schematic roots are from a fairy tale involving a hero who, having been expelled from his inheritance, returns after a stay with outlaws in the wilderness.[40] Real history, then, does not appear with David and the early monarchy.

The Minimalists and Their Opponents

A group of scholars who came to prominence in the 1990s and who have initiated major controversies among historians and archaeologists have come to be commonly called "minimalists" on account of their view that only a minimal amount of history is recoverable from the biblical and archaeological evidence. While Lemche has come to be numbered among them[41] and

34. "The Construction of the Davidic State" (see above, n. 7).

35. *Early Israel: Anthropological and Historical Studies on the Israelite Society before the Monarchy* (VT Supplement 37; Leiden: Brill, 1985).

36. Ibid., 375–80.

37. Ibid., 414.

38. Biblical Seminar 5; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1988.

39. Ibid., 119–20.

40. Ibid., 37, 53–54. Lemche compares the story of Idrimi of Alalakh, from his inscription: forced to flee when his father was killed in a revolt, he joined a group of Sutu warriors in the desert and then a band of Apiru in Canaan for seven years before his return to Alalakh as king.

41. Lemche's *The Israelites in History and Tradition* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998) places him fully among the minimalists.

they regard Van Seters as a founding father, the best-known exponents of their views are Philip Davies and Thomas L. Thompson. With reference to our subject, they regard the entire biblical narrative as very late and doubt the very existence of David and the united monarchy.

An extreme position on the origin and historical value of the literature was taken by Davies in his *In Search of "Ancient Israel"* (1992),[42] where he argued that the preexilic history of Israel is essentially a fiction created in the Persian period, when scribes were organized to invent a past for the people settled by the Persians in the province of Yehud. Saul, David, Solomon, and the united monarchy are products of their imagination.

According to Davies it was in the interest of Cyrus, for political and economic reasons, to repopulate the province of Yehud, and he sent there a mixed population, which may have included some descendants of those deported from there by the Babylonians. The ruling class of this population, based in the governor's palace and the temple in Jerusalem, amid the religious and social tensions of the period, required self-definition. They directed colleges of scribes, who like their other Near Eastern counterparts were connected with palace or temple archives, to create a collective past for this population. The result was historical literature (Genesis through Kings, Chronicles–Ezra–Nehemiah) which used the term "Israel" to designate a people chosen by God to inhabit Palestine, originally newcomers to the land like the immigrants of the Persian period. Biblical literature

> . . . emerged as a political-cultural product of the Jerusalem "establishment" . . . based in the temple there, though perhaps also in the court of the governor. . . . [It] became definitive of a traditional culture among certain classes, and in particular came to be adopted by groups wishing to adopt a "Judaean" lifestyle.[43]

The scribes worked with some earlier materials that had survived in Palestine. There had existed a kingdom of Israel, as witnessed by Assyrian inscriptions referring to the House of Omri, but it had been ethnically and religiously mixed, not the "Israel" of the later biblical literature. Judah, on the other hand, for which there are no early nonbiblical references, was not a state at all before the eighth century. Certainly there was no tenth-century empire or elaborate Judaean administration based in Jerusalem under David.[44] The account of Josiah's reform is an unverified attempt

42. JSOT Supplement Series 148; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992.
43. Ibid., 20.
44. Ibid., 66–69.

to give authority to Deuteronomy,[45] and the Babylonian exile itself is part of a myth of return to establish continuity with the invented past.[46]

Pre–Persian-period material that the scribes found included written or oral "stories about kings, warriors, and holy men, songs cultic and non-cultic."[47] In a playful "exercise in imagination," which Davies said was not to be taken even as a hypothesis, but which reveals his attitude toward the development of the text, he suggested that from such material one scribal college may have turned David from a "limp musician" into a "womanising warrior." Meanwhile, an opposing college might have written the court history that showed David to be a weak parent and king.[48]

T. L. Thompson's *Early History of the Israelite People: From the Written and Archaeological Sources* (1992),[49] while following the lines of Davies's thesis, is a much longer book that surveys textual and archaeological scholarship and details the underpinnings of what we might call the Thompson-Davies Hypothesis. His reading of the archaeology of the region negated the traditional understanding of the history of Israel and Judah as found in the biblical narratives.[50] In Iron Age I (1250–1050) the Mycenaean drought produced migrations and subsequent population dislocations. The central highlands region of Palestine saw the growth of small villages made up of a mixed population dominated by those dislocated from the lowland cities. The Bible refers to these lowland cities as "Canaanite." The prosperity and rapid population growth of Iron II (1050–850) produced a regional arrangement in the central hills with Samaria as its capital and its center for trade. The historicity of Samaria and its role is confirmed by Assyrian texts. Meanwhile, the south underwent slower development. From 1000 to 700 Jerusalem was but a small and unimportant town, smaller than Lachish or Gezer. Only in the seventh century did Jerusalem grow and become an imperial city-state (not the capital of an ethnic nation-state), exercising influence southward toward Hebron and the northern Negev. After the invasions, deportations, and importations of people by the Assyrians and the Babylonians, Israel and Judah ceased to exist.

The Persians also moved populations under the banner of "restoring" peoples and gods. But "restoration" talk was basically rhetoric. In resettling Yehud the Persians virtually created a new people and a new cult, though part of this population must have been descended from the old inhabitants.

45. Ibid., 40.
46. Ibid., 87.
47. Ibid., 94.
48. Ibid., 121ff.
49. Studies in the History of the Ancient Near East 4; Leiden: Brill, 1992.
50. Ibid., 215ff., 407ff.

This was the setting for the scribal effort that created a past for the "returnees from exile," a work that led to the identification of the population with Judah and the more inclusive "Israel," and which helped turn YHWH of Samaria into a universal God (Elohim) whose worship was based in Jerusalem.[51]

As Wellhausen a century earlier pushed the oldest literature of Israel from the Mosaic period forward to the tenth century, Davies and Thompson have pushed its creation down to the Persian period and beyond to the Hellenistic age. They have characterized as unproven and most likely unhistorical the Bible's own framework of events, periods, and chronology from the beginning to the Babylonian exile. Because the biblical texts are both late and tendentious, they cannot be used to establish even a framework for history. Archaeology, independent of the biblical narrative, provides the primary materials for historical reconstruction; but Thompson's and Davies's reading of the archaeological data, or lack of data, has led them to reject an Israelite united monarchy in the tenth century. What does that do to the story of David?

Davies suggested that the Persian-period scribes invented the past from their own imaginations. Thompson's 1992 work is closer to Rosenberg, Van Seters, and Lemche in accepting the existence of pre-Persian traditions that became part of the new historical stew. These traditions are described by Thompson as "incoherent part fictive remnants of a past that the survivors of the destruction and their descendants were able to put together and give meaning to in the radically new worlds into which they were thrown."[52] The scribes imposed thematic arrangement and chronological order on traditions and their variants to present an Israel *redivivus* whose significance lay in its relationship with YHWH from the patriarchs through the desert, the period of Judges, the united and divided monarchies, to the exile. The Assyrian and Babylonian exiles became pivotal in that they explained prophetic and other concepts of covenant violations as leading to divine punishment.[53] Furthermore, the scribes acted not as historians but as uncritical antiquarian collectors of traditions and accounts. Thompson's term for their work is "ethnographic aetiology."[54]

With regard to literature, there never were any lengthy accounts like the Pentateuch's J source or the Succession Narrative before the Persian period; and with regard to history, there is no extrabiblical (archaeological) evidence for Jerusalemite or Judaean hegemony in the tenth century, for the united monarchy, or for the foundation roles of Saul, David, and Solomon. Thompson was willing to grant some historical authenticity to dynastic lists,

51. Ibid., 417ff.
52. Ibid., 394.
53. Ibid., 372.
54. Ibid., 383.

laws, prophetic poems, songs, and wisdom sayings; but even with these we cannot determine the degree of transformation of old traditions, and we can never be sure about their original context.[55] On the one hand, quotations of old literature such as the Book of Yashar or the Book of the Wars of YHWH may provide a "major avenue into the greater literary world of our texts," but on the other hand the alleged quotations may actually be pseudo-verifications of what the prose text is describing.[56]

Archaeological evidence for the existence of a Judaean state before the seventh century would, of course, damage much of the Thompson-Davies position. In fact, criticism of the way Thompson and Davies cite and interpret archaeological evidence is the main focus of their opponents' attack on their position.[57] Publication of a fragmentary ninth-century Aramaic inscription from Tel Dan which contains the phrase, "House of David," would appear to attest to the existence of the Davidic dynasty at least as far back as that time.[58] Davies's response was to suggest that the reference might be to a place name or something other than the Judaean kingdom named for the founder of its dynasty.[59] This assertion led to a series of often vituperative exchanges in academic and popular journals, and to more sober reviews of Davies's and Thompson's work.[60] In personal attacks on their competence, Davies and Thompson have been called "revisionists," "deconstructionists," and even "nihilists," whose approach to biblical traditions should be ignored. Davies prefers to be called a "minimalist" with regard to the Bible's

55. Ibid., 366.

56. Ibid., 364.

57. See, e.g., W. Dever, " 'Will the Real Israel Please Stand Up?' Archaeology and Israelite Historiography: Part I," *BASOR* 297 (1995): 61–80, and more recently, his *What Did the Biblical Writers Know and When Did They Know It?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001).

58. A. Biran and J. Naveh, "An Aramaic Stele Fragment from Tel Dan," *IEJ* 43 (1993): 81–98. For another possible ninth-century inscription see A. Lemaire, " 'House of David' Restored in Moabite Inscription," *BAR* 20, no. 5 (1994): 30–37.

59. P. R. Davies, " 'House of David' Built on Sand: The Sins of the Biblical Maximizers," *BAR* 20, no. 4 (1994): 54–55.

60. A. Rainey, "The 'House of David' and the House of the Deconstructionists," *BAR* 20, no. 6 (1994): 47. Z. Zevit, review of Davies, *In Search of Ancient Israel,* in *AJS Review* 20, no. 1 (1995): 153–56, characterizes Davies's description of the Persian-period Jerusalem community as "pure fiction." Rainey's review of Thompson, *Early History of the Israelite People,* in *AJS Review* 20, no. 1 (1995): 156–60, accuses Thompson of dilettantism and misreading of evidence. In a collection of articles in *JBL* 114 (1995) I. Provan, "Ideologies, Literary and Critical: Reflections on Recent Writing on the History of Israel," attacks Lemche, Thompson, and Davies on methodological grounds (585–606), while Thompson, "A Neo-Albrightean School in History and Biblical Scholarship" (683–98), and Davies, "Method and Madness: Some Remarks on Doing History with the Bible" (699–705) defend and counterattack. See Thompson's more recent *The Mythic Past: Biblical Archaeology and the Myth of Israel* (London: Basic Books, 1999) and challenges such as the online review of M. Hamilton in *Review of Biblical Literature* (*www.bookreviews.org*), July 2000.

historicity; he calls his opponents "maximalists." Davies has maintained his position that the kingdom and tenth–ninth century dynasty of David never existed. "I am not the only scholar," he wrote, "who suspects that the figure of King David is about as historical as King Arthur."[61]

Those who represent the antiminimalist position do not consider themselves maximalists, a term more appropriate for the old school of W. F. Albright. They tend to agree with the minimalists that the biblical texts are late and must be used with caution. But, contrary to the minimalists, their interpretation of the archaeological evidence and insistence that there are some early reliable texts underlying the biblical account lead them to uphold — with qualifications — the existence of the early monarchy. Only a brief description of their position is offered here.[62]

William Dever, for example, challenges Davies's and Thompson's view that the lack of archaeological evidence for the early monarchy suggests its nonexistence; they both ignore and misinterpret the evidence that does exist. This includes seals, ostraca, graffiti and inscriptions that witness the existence of biblical Hebrew as a distinct language, a "remarkably homogeneous" material culture from the tenth to the sixth century, the Tel Dan inscription, and numerous convergences between what is described in the biblical text and Iron Age villages and artifacts, as well as Philistine finds.[63] Nadav Na'aman argues that biblical materials such as descriptions of the Aramean (2 Sam 8) and Philistine wars (2 Sam 5) are based on early accounts which must have been incorporated into an early eighth-century chronicle which was, in turn, used by Dtr.[64]

A major point of contention is the work of D. W. Jamieson-Drake, *Scribes and Schools in Monarchic Judah: A Socio-Archeological Approach* (1991).[65] His survey of archaeological remains of walls, public buildings, luxury items, and evidence of writing produced statistical charts demonstrating that the quantity of such items in Jerusalem was relatively small until the eighth and seventh centuries, a notable spike in such material finds not occurring until the seventh century. He concluded that the paucity of

61. Davies, " 'House of David' Built on Sand," 55.

62. For an overview, see W. Dever, " 'Will the Real Israel Please Stand Up?' Archaeology and Israelite Historiography: Part I," and G. Knoppers, "The Vanishing Solomon: The Disappearance of the United Monarchy from Recent Histories of Ancient Israel," *JBL* 116 (1997): 19–44.

63. Dever, " 'Will the Real Israel Please Stand Up?' " 69, 72, and *What Did the Biblical Writers Know, passim*. See also the interesting symposium organized by editor H. Shanks in *BAR* 23, no. 4 (1997): 26–42, 66, which included Thompson, Lemche, Dever, and McCarter.

64. N. Na'aman, "Sources and Composition in the History of David," in *The Origins of the Ancient Israelite States* (ed. V. Fritz and P. Davies; JSOT Supplement 228; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996).

65. JSOT Supplement 109; Sheffield: Almond Press, 1991.

these items before the eighth century implied that the level of population and production was too low for a state and the development of scribal schools. At best the domains of David and Solomon were chiefdoms, not sufficiently organized to be called states. Thompson and Davies seized upon Jamieson-Drake's data as support for their position against the existence of the united monarchy or any Judaean state as early as the tenth century. Furthermore, the absence of scribal schools made the writing of early accounts of the monarchy unlikely and strengthened their argument for the late invention of narratives about David and Solomon.

Na'aman's reaction in both academic and popular journals is an interesting compromise. In addition to the arguments for early texts (see above), Na'aman cites the example of the Canaanite towns that appear in the Amarna Letters of the fourteenth century.[66] We know of their rulers and territorial concerns and ambitions from the correspondence sent to Egypt. They make reference, for example, to Ursalim's (Jerusalem's) domination of the highlands from Bethel to Hebron. There were palaces, royal attendants, and (as the letters themselves suggest) scribes. Yet there are hardly any Late Bronze II archaeological remains. The paucity of tenth-century remains similarly proves little except to suggest a smaller physical scale and scope of operations than what the Bible indicates, similar to that of the Amarna towns. For Na'aman, David and Solomon existed and information was recorded by scribes. But they were not the imperial national monarchs of Samuel–Kings. David ruled a chiefdom and from his fortress at Jerusalem dominated his neighbors, just as Labayu had done in the Amarna Age from his base at Shechem. Solomon built a small temple and established a court with scribes. But this was a temporary chiefdom and it soon collapsed. Na'aman's compromise between the minimalists and the exaggerations of the biblical text is expressed in the title of his popular article on Jerusalem: "Cowtown or Royal Capital?"[67]

The twenty-first century has seen the appearance of two new works on the life and times of David: Steven L. McKenzie, *King David: A Biography,*[68] and Baruch Halpern, *David's Secret Demons: Messiah, Murderer, Traitor, King.*[69] Both accept the basic historicity of the situation underlying the biblical narrative, but with qualifications that are discussed in greater detail in chapters 7 and 8.

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66. N. Na'aman, "The Contribution of the Amarna Letters to the Debate on Jerusalem's Political Position in the Tenth Century B.C.E.," *BASOR* 304 (1996): 17–28.
67. *BAR* 23, no. 4 (1997): 43–47, 67.
68. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.
69. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001.

Chapter 3

Popular Heroic Tradition

Another perspective on the biblical narratives about David is to see the current text of 1 Sam 1 to 1 Kgs 2 as a collection and arrangement of material that might be described as pre-Dtr popular literature of a heroic nature — not historical records — edited by the Deuteronomist to reflect his political and religious purposes. There are in the Hebrew Bible many short poetic and prose units that are for Rost and the source critics the building blocks of the longer narratives, and for the minimalists, "part fictive remnants." Of the schools of thought described in the previous chapter, the approach taken here is closest to that of Van Seters.

First and Second Samuel have numerous poetic fragments or prose abridgements of what were originally far more extensive and detailed popular traditions. These passages are brief, and many appear to be incomplete, shortened from their original form. Dtr — it matters not whether he did the abbreviating, as is probable, or found them already abbreviated — worked them into his history without explanatory details, probably assuming that his readers would be familiar with the references. If so, this redactor would probably be located in the Josianic age or the Babylonian exile, when memories of Judaean popular culture were still fresh, but the persistence of oral traditions does not rule out even the early Persian period.

Poetic Fragments

David's lament for the fallen Saul and Jonathan (2 Sam 1:17–27) is quoted from the Scroll of Yashar, a text cited also in Jos 10:12–13 and similarly in a military context. In both cases the text states that the poems are *written* in the Scroll of Yashar. At the time it was cited by the author of our passage, the Scroll of Yashar appears to have been a written document rather than or in addition to being an oral tradition. While the scope of its narrative is impossible to determine, a reasonable guess is that it may have included accounts of military events that covered a time at least from Joshua through

David. A second poem, also a lament, this one concerning Abner (2 Sam 3:33–34), and a third, the poetic praises of the Israelite women for David's military prowess (1 Sam 18:7), are given no attribution.

One may speculate about what else might have been in the Scroll of Yashar: for example, accounts of battles involving the judges and David, and perhaps nonmilitary adventures as well. It was composed at the earliest during the tenth century and at the latest before the exile. Whatever the date of the written composition, it probably had oral antecedents. Neither of its fragments (nor the poem on Abner) mention YHWH or divine activity. Joshua, not God, orders the sun to stand still. It is presumptuous to draw conclusions from such small fragments, but a hypothetical one might be that the Scroll of Yashar was a secular epic (to the extent that any ancient literature can be secular), free not so much of references to divinity but of the theological framework and apologetics that characterize Dtr's prose account. Of course, the only thing we really know about the Scroll of Yashar is that the present text of 2 Samuel cites it, and the way it is cited indicates that it contained more material, probably longer narratives that provided the contexts for the fragments that survived.

Catalogues of Heroes

In 2 Sam 21:15–22 four of David's men — Abishai son of Zeruiah, Sibbekai the Hushatite, Elhanan son of Yair (the more probable reading in 1 Chr 20:5 as opposed to the textually corrupted name Ya'arei Oregim in 2 Sam 21:19) the Bethlehemite, and Jonathan son of Shim'ai the brother of David — kill four mighty Philistines, in one case saving David's life. Called "offspring of the Raphah," these Philistines were large men who wielded large weapons or had singular features such as twelve fingers and toes. In 2 Sam 23 additional heroes and feats of valor are mentioned — literally just mentioned. Yoshev Bashevet the Tahkemonite killed eight hundred of the enemy at one time (23:8; he is called Yeshav'am in 1 Chr 11:11, where he is said to have killed only three hundred); Eleazar son of Dodo son of Ahohi covered Israel's retreat and fought so hard his hand stuck to his sword (vv. 9–10); Shammah son of Age the Hararite single-handedly defeated the Philistines in a lentil field when everyone else had fled (11–12); Abishai killed three hundred with a spear (18–19). The only episode described in somewhat greater detail (five verses) is one in which three unnamed heroes (Yeshav'am, Eleazar, and Shammah again?) stole into the Philistine garrison at Bethlehem to bring David, who was at Adullam, a drink of water from his hometown's well (13–17).

These brief passages are obviously only references to what must have been longer and exciting popular tales. There certainly were many interesting narrative details behind the mere two sentences (20–21) in which Benaiah son of Jehoiada, in one incident, slew two *ariel*s (whatever is meant by this term)[1] of Moab, and in a second killed a lion in a pit on a snowy day, and in a third killed an Egyptian with his own spear! Yeshav'am, Eleazar, and Shammah belonged to an elite group of warriors — the Three — and in verses 24–39 we have a list of the other leading soldiers, the Thirty (*sheloshim;* or the commanders, *shelishim?*). Of these Thirty, two definitely, and possibly others, are known from elsewhere: Asahel the brother of Joab (v. 24), who was killed by Abner in battle during the war between David and Saul's son Ishbaal (Ishboshet in the text; 2 Sam 2), and Uriah the Hittite (v. 39), whom we know as Bathsheba's husband and David's victim from 2 Sam 11. Elhanan son of Dodo the Bethlehemite (v. 24) and Shammah the Harodite (v. 25; read Hararite?) may be variants of the Elhanan and Shammah noted above. Ittai son of Ribai (v. 29) may be the Gittite officer who served David against Absalom (2 Sam 15 and elsewhere; see below). Eliam son of Ahitophel (v. 34) may be the father of Bathsheba (see 2 Sam 11:3)

Parallels with Homeric epic in the lists of heroes and in the duels have been amply demonstrated, for example by Cyrus Gordon.[2] It needs to be stressed, however, that the biblical passages must be understood as only fragments of much larger poems, legends, or tales. The duel between Asahel and Abner in 2 Sam 2, with its fuller description and dialogue, may be an example of a surviving extended narrative.

In the case of Gen 6:1–4, where the sons of God mingle with the daughters of men and produce (?) a race of Nephilim, it must be assumed that the Israelite readers of the text were acquainted with the larger myth to which Genesis merely refers in four sentences. Similarly the fragmentary references to the culture-hero sons of Lemech (Gen 4:19–24) and to Nimrod (Gen 10:9) presuppose the reading audience's knowledge of the fuller traditions. Otherwise their inclusion in the text is inexplicable. As C. R. Beye wrote about the Homeric epics, "The saga background permits the poet to make allusions which are often obscure to us, but were likely not obscure to his original audience."[3] The Davidic hero fragments, or more

1. Perhaps "two sons of Ariel," the LXX reading; McCarter, *II Samuel,* 491. B. Halpern, *David's Secret Demons,* 267–68, suggests Ariel as a clan name of the Gadite population of Moab; cf. Gen 46:16 and Num 26:17.

2. C. Gordon, "Homer and the Bible. The Origin and Character of East Mediterranean Literature," *HUCA* 26 (1955): 43–108.

3. C. R. Beye, *The Iliad, the Odyssey, and the Epic Tradition* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1966), 19.

accurately, abbreviated references, compel us to posit the existence of an extensive heroic tradition involving David and his companions that was known by the Judaean and perhaps Israelite public in the centuries after David. Dtr would not have invented these tales only to abbreviate them and relegate most of them to an appendix near the end of David's biography; moreover, the exaggerations and fantastic elements in the story fragments make it unlikely that they were based on historical records.

Might there have been epic poetry about David and his warriors? The hero fragments are all in prose, but they are only references to a set of stories that may have circulated in poetry. Might these also have been included in a text like the Scroll of Yashar, as was David's lament for the heroic Saul and Jonathan, itself often compared to Achilles' lament for Patroclus? These questions cannot be answered, but the possibility must be admitted.

Several periods of David's life as described in the biblical account are covered by these tales. David's camp at Adullam while the Philistines had a garrison at Bethlehem points either to David's outlaw period or to the wars against the Philistines shortly after he became king of Judah and Israel. Asahel had been killed in a duel with Abner in the civil war through which David united the monarchy. When Abishai saved David from a Philistine (2 Sam 21:15–17) David was persuaded by his men to join them in battle no longer, so that "the lamp of Israel should not be extinguished." The reference must be to the beginning of David's reign as king, when he still fought at the head of his army. Uriah was still alive after David remained in Jerusalem and left the fighting to his generals. Benaiah the son of Jehoiada became the chief of David's praetorian guard in Jerusalem and ultimately Solomon's chief of staff, replacing Joab, who had been with David from the beginning. The hero stories and lists thus appear to belong to several stages in David's career, all of which must have been included in the heroic tradition. In the stories some of these warriors are companions of David during his romantic outlaw days and go on to become the stalwarts of his royal army. Others are later recruits. The heroic tales, then, are set not only in the period covered in what historians have called the History of David's Rise (HDR), but also in the period described by the so-called Succession History (or Narrative).

The story of David has other elements characteristic of heroic literature. Some examples are explored below.

The Hero's Companion

The hero lists in 2 Sam 21 and 23 name Abishai and Asahel as sons of Zeruiah and brothers of Joab. Joab himself, the king's second in command,

is interestingly not listed among the heroes (but his two armor bearers are in 2 Sam 23:37). In the rest of the biblical narrative, however, he is the figure next in importance to David. He is David's military commander, fiercely loyal to his master's interests, even if he has to manipulate David (into a reconciliation with Absalom, 2 Sam 14), reprimand him (about mourning for Absalom, 2 Sam 19), or challenge his plans (for a census, 2 Sam 24). He is David's accomplice in the murder of Uriah (2 Sam 11). After successfully conducting the entire Ammonite campaign, a cleverly self-effacing Joab demonstrates an understanding of public relations and image building when he invites the king to be present at the fall of Rabbah, so that David rather than he will get credit for the victory (1 Sam 12). He also looks after his own welfare in the assassinations of rivals Abner and Amasa (2 Sam 3 and 20) and in his support of Adonijah against Solomon (1 Kgs 1). He is his own man, but also David's agent and a power behind the throne; he is not David's friend or companion. For that we must look at Joab's oft-neglected brother Abishai.

Abishai is overshadowed by Joab in Samuel–Kings, but the portrait that emerges from scattered passages is very interesting. Like Joab, Abishai is a military leader, commanding a division of the army (against Ammon, 2 Sam 10; against Absalom, 18) or all of it (8, against Edom;[4] 20, against Sheba ben Bichri). His name is included in David's self-serving denunciation of Joab's family for the revenge killing of Abner (2 Sam 3:30), but in the actual narrative of the assassination only Joab is said to have been the perpetrator (3:22–27; but an editorial summary remark in v. 30 about the assassination includes Abishai). Abishai once killed three hundred men in battle and was the most honored of the Thirty leading warriors, chosen as their commander (2 Sam 23:18f.; a better reading of the seemingly corrupt text, which has him as head of the Three). This is more or less his public career.

But like Gawain to Arthur, Abishai is also David's friend and loyal companion. In 1 Sam 26:6ff. David and Abishai sneak into the camp of Saul, who had been pursuing David, and discover the king asleep. Abishai wishes to rid David of his nemesis by killing Saul on the spot with a blow of his spear. David stops him, and instead they steal Saul's spear in order to confront him with it later. In 2 Sam 16:5ff, when David, fleeing Absalom's coup, is cursed by Shime'i the son of Gera, it is Abishai who offers to behead David's tormentor. David stops him again, and once more reins him

4. Second Samuel 8:13 has David defeating Aram in the Valley of Salt; but with the support of 1 Chr 18:12, Josephus, *Ant.* 7.109, and partially the LXX reading, the text should be amended to record Abishai's victory over Edom. See McCarter, *II Samuel,* 246.

in (2 Sam 19:22–24) when Abishai, now accompanying the king in his triumphant return, repeats his offer to slay Shime'i. Finally, in one of the hero fragments (2 Sam 21:15–17) Abishai saves David's life by killing a powerful Philistine soldier; he then suggests that David no longer go out on the battlefield because his life is too important to risk.

Thus in several pieces of narrative Abishai is consistently the personal companion and defender of David. He is the one who is closest to David in his daring raids, on the battlefield, in dishonorable retreat, and in victory. In the more detailed legends of David and his men Abishai must have been a prominent and well-developed character, the stereotypical loyal companion of the king. We don't know what happened to him. He is absent from the story of Adonijah and Solomon's rivalry for the throne (1 Kgs 1), and he is not included with Joab in David's list of those Solomon should kill for having crossed him (1 Kgs 2).

Other Characters

There are other examples where we are given a glimpse of detail beyond short notices in the hero fragments. The first two are well known: Uriah the Hittite, one of the Thirty, the cuckolded and victimized husband of Bathsheba; and Benaiah son of Jehoiada, who became captain of the royal guard under David and army commander under Solomon. A third is Jonathan the son of David's brother Shim'ai (2 Sam 21:20–21), one of the four who vanquished strong Philistines, in this case a six-fingered and six-toed descendant of the Raphah. A Jonadab son of David's brother Shim'ah — probably a variant name of the same person — appears in 2 Sam 13:3ff. as a crafty member of the royal household who advises David's son Amnon about how to satisfy his lust for his half-sister Tamar. Later (13:32) he reports to David about the death of Amnon at the hands of Tamar's brother Absalom. This isn't much, but it does suggest that in the fuller heroic traditions characters who are briefly referred to in the biblical fragments were more fully fleshed out and played substantial roles. We might include among such characters the local strongmen who were loyal to David during Absalom's revolt, Machir of Lo Debar and Barzillai of Rogelim (2 Sam 17:27).

Other Heroic Elements

In his study, "Homer and the Bible. The Origin and Character of East Mediterranean Literature" (1955), Gordon described several parallel themes in

the Homeric epics and the biblical story of David.[5] Some Homeric motifs relevant to the search for the heroic or epic components of the David material may be listed briefly with the Davidic parallels:

- Rivalry between royal houses (Saul and David)
- Charismatic leadership (Saul and David)
- Carrying off of women and their rescue (raid on Ziklag, 1 Sam 30)
- Scandal and romantic love (Abigail; Bathsheba; Amnon, Tamar, and Absalom)
- Catalogues of heroes (see above)
- Duels of single combatants (David and Goliath, Asahel and Abner, several examples in 2 Sam 21 and 23)
- Triads of military commanders (the Three; Joab, Abishai, and Ittai the Gittite in 2 Sam 18)
- Friendship and exchange of gifts (Jonathan and David, 1 Sam 18; 2 Sam 1:17ff.)
- Laments for fallen warriors (for Saul and Jonathan, Abner)

There are other examples perhaps less convincing, but these suffice to strengthen the probability that the early form of some units in the story of David was heroic tale, if not epic poetry.

David and Goliath

The episode of David and Goliath deserves special attention as a prime example of different kinds of literary analysis. It became a central feature of the biblical story of David, and at least one contemporary scholar has given it messianic significance.

First Samuel 16:1–13 on the anointment of David by Samuel is considered by many source critics to belong to a late-monarchical prophetic supplement. The details of the selection of David, the youngest of Jesse's sons, however, may be tied to the ensuing chapter in which the young and brash David is rebuked by his older brother. In any case the previous narrative from 1 Sam 15 (YHWH's rejection of Saul) then picks up with 16:14–24: An evil spirit comes upon Saul. David son of Jesse, described in glowing terms, is brought to the court as armor bearer to the king, and as a musician he succeeds in soothing Saul's spirit.

5. See Gordon, 65–90.

But the further continuation in 2 Sam 17–18 presents new difficulties. Forty of the eighty-eight verses in this section are omitted by the Septuagint's Ms. B (Codex Vaticanus), the one usually relied upon by LXX scholars as most closely representing the earliest text. There is disagreement as to whether these forty verses belonged to the "original" Hebrew text or were a separate Hebrew stratum inserted to supplement the original or to serve a harmonistic or editorial purpose.[6]

The LXXB Version

The LXXB material (17:1–11, 32–40, 42–48a, 49, 51–54; 18:6–9, 12–16, 20–29a) may be summarized as follows: In the war between the Philistines and Saul's troops a large Philistine, Goliath by name, whose arms are fully described, issues a challenge of single combat against an Israelite champion yet to be chosen. The Israelites are afraid, but David volunteers. He acknowledges his youth but describes how, when he was a shepherd, he killed a lion and a bear. The living God, YHWH, he says, will help, for the uncircumcised Philistine has cast aspersions upon him. The armor and weapons that Saul offers David are too cumbersome, and he takes up a staff and stones. The Philistine mocks David and threatens him, but David declares that he fights in the name of YHWH. David strikes down the Philistine with a stone and then kills the giant with his own sword, cutting off his head. The Philistines flee before the Israelites. David deposits the head in Jerusalem and Goliath's arms in his own tent. Upon their return from defeating the Philistines Saul and David are praised, but Saul becomes angry when he perceives that David is praised more than he is. Saul sees that YHWH is with David (a recurring phrase in the LXXB version); Saul makes David an officer in the army. David is a successful military leader, beloved by all Israel. Saul's daughter Michal loves David, and Saul offers her to him, but the humble and relatively poor David is reluctant to marry into the royal house. Saul offers a way for David to pay the bride price, privately hoping that David will be killed: he is to bring back from battle one hundred Philistine foreskins. To Saul's chagrin David returns with two hundred and marries Michal. Saul continues to fear David.

The Material Omitted by LXXB

The material not in LXXB (17:12–31, 41, 48b, 50, 55–58; 18:1–5, 10–11, 17–19, 29b–30) contains the following: David, a shepherd, is introduced as the son of Jesse, and three of his older brothers who serve in the army are named (the same three as in 16:1–15). The Philistines have stood facing the

6. See, for example, general discussion in McCarter, *I Samuel,* 284–309.

Israelites for forty days, and David is sent by his father to the front with food (fully described) for his brothers. He sees Goliath and discovers that a reward has been offered for killing the Philistine: riches, the hand of Saul's daughter, and tax-free status (if that is the correct meaning of the Hebrew *ḥpšy*) for his family. David shows interest and is rebuked by his brother Eliab. But Saul hears about the young man. When Goliath and his armor bearer approach, David runs toward them and kills the Philistine with a stone, for he has no sword. Saul asks the identity of the hero ("Whose son is this boy?"), but Abner doesn't know. When David is brought before him with Goliath's head, he tells Saul that he is the son of Jesse the Bethlehemite. Saul's son Jonathan loves David and gives him gifts of clothing and weapons. Saul keeps David at his court and commissions him as a military officer, a job at which David is successful. David plays music to dispel Saul's evil spirit, but has to escape twice when a jealous Saul throws spears at him. Thinking to have him killed in battle, Saul offers David his daughter Merab if he will go off to war. David humbly rejects the marriage, and Merab is married to another. Saul is an enemy to David as the young commander becomes Israel's most successful Philistine fighter.

The story and its components have been analyzed in various ways. S. DeVries (1973), for example, read the text as two separate accounts.[7] The non-LXXB material is a "hero saga," closer to historical reality in detail and time of composition. The LXXB version is of a different genre: a holy-war narrative of YHWH's fight against opposing powers — a "contest legend." Its original date, according to DeVries, was after Solomon but before Ahab, since Baalism is not yet referred to as the enemy. The hero saga was altered and expanded early in a pro-David and anti-Saul direction. The contest legend became the Vorlage for the LXX. Later redaction preserved both stories.

For McCarter (1980) the LXXB text is the older story. Into an original account of Saul and David's defeat of the Philistines has been worked the tale of the young shepherd and the Philistine giant (the name Goliath transferred here from the Elhanan story of 2 Sam 21). In its final form the text expressed the themes of the ideal future king against the forces of evil and YHWH's grant of victory to the small David over the large Goliath and the weak Israelites over the strong Philistines.[8] The non-LXXB material is an alternate account based on Jerusalemite traditions of an idealized David preserved by the Judaean exiles; it may have been a very old tale, but it was not

7. S. J. DeVries, "David's Victory over the Philistines as Saga and as Legend," *JBL* 92 (1973): 23–36.

8. McCarter, *I Samuel*, 296–97.

interpolated into the text before the fourth century. McCarter rejects the idea that the non-LXXB account is an abridgement of the earlier story and argues that its harmonizing tendency is minimal.[9]

Heda Jason (1979), a folklorist who regards the text from an entirely different point of view, has reached different conclusions: that the story is a romantic epic, a subgenre of historical epic, and that the text is unitary, containing narrative duplications typical of epic literature, although certain elements of both the LXXB and the non-LXXB material are earlier than others.[10] Many themes associated with fairy tales and romantic epics are present, but the historical setting and lack of supernatural intervention indicate epic rather than fairy tale.[11] The hero is an unknown outsider who is sent by his father, slays the dragon, as it were, cuts off part of its body, and wins the hand of the princess. His older siblings attempt unsuccessfully to squelch his efforts. He is given weapons, but they are not appropriate; he chooses his own.[12] (There are other characteristic literary aspects — three brothers, three items of food, six weapons, etc. — that we do not pursue here.) In the original version David wins a place at the royal court — an epic reward — rather than the princess; in the longer developed story he gets both. The circumstances leading up to David's fight against the giant are original in the non-LXXB version (17:12–31 rather than the LXXB text, 17:32–40) because the genre demands a previously *unknown* young hero.[13] David's position as an armor bearer of Saul *before* the Goliath episode is not possible in the original. However, neither can the role of Jonathan in the non-LXXB version (18:1–5) be original, for the king must have a daughter, not a son.[14]

Thus Jason defines the universal folk literature genre and imposes the characteristics of the genre on the details of the story. She may also be looking at the details too narrowly. Even in LXXB David began as an unknown who at best was Saul's armor bearer or squire, not an experienced fighter, and still a comparative outsider to the ranks of Saul's warriors. David cites his earlier prowess as a shepherd defending his sheep and finds the arms offered him unwieldy. After killing Goliath he is given a place among Saul's senior warriors, and a second battlefield feat allows him to marry Michal. One version (non-LXXB) of the story in 1 Sam 17–18

9. Ibid., 307–8.
10. H. Jason, "The Story of David and Goliath: A Folk Epic?" *Biblica* 60 (1979): 36–90.
11. Ibid., 54, 62–65.
12. Ibid., 41, 44–45.
13. Ibid., 67.
14. Ibid., 44.

is thus an unknown-shepherd-to-hero-to-officer/courtier tale; the other sequence (LXXB) is shepherd/musician-to-squire-to-hero-to-knight-to-prince. Both seem to meet Jason's criteria for romantic epic, and they do appear to represent variant versions of the same account.

McCarter and Jason assume the early origins of several of the narrative elements. Jason specifically regards them as epic in nature and suggests they arose from an oral tradition or a written one that imitated oral narrative.[15] While she finds some evidence that poetic parallelism underlies a small number of passages, she is unwilling to conclude that the biblical story was based on poetic rather than prose epic.[16]

The Story of David and Goliath, published in 1986, presented a symposium of papers and responses on the literary and textual criticism of the subject, with contributions from John Lust, Dominique Barthélemy, Emanuel Tov, and David Gooding.[17] The positions in brief: Lust differentiated the genres of the LXXB and non-LXXB versions as heroic epic and romantic epic, respectively. A redactor combined the two separate versions and added harmonistic passages. For Tov, whose analysis was primarily textual and linguistic, LXXB represented an earlier stage, connected with 16:17–23 (David as harpist and armor bearer), while the non-LXX later addition continued the theme of David as shepherd. The LXX translator worked from an early Hebrew text that included only the early version; the current larger biblical text is a later combination of that version with the additional one. Barthélemy also posited two versions of the story. The translator found them both — already combined — in his Vorlage, and in an attempt to eliminate discrepancies, produced a shorter Greek text. Gooding, however, working primarily on literary grounds, employing comparisons with Greek epic, argued that the allegedly combined text was actually the unified original. Both the full text and the non-LXX version could stand alone as complete stories; only the LXX material taken by itself presents difficulties as an independent tale. Whoever produced the shorter text represented by LXXB attempted to improve upon the original by omitting doublets and discrepancies, leaving a truncated text. The "improvement" could have been at the Hebrew or the Greek stage, but the Greek is more likely.

Gooding notes that the non-LXX version is essentially a story about family. The jealousy of his brothers, which may be seen as beginning with

15. Ibid., 61.
16. Ibid., 37–39.
17. D. Barthélemy, D. W. Gooding, E. Tov, J. Lust, *The Story of David and Goliath: Textual and Literary Criticism. Papers of a Joint Research Venture,* Editions Universitaires Fribourg Suisse (Göttingen: Vandenhoek & Ruprecht, 1986).

his anointment in 1 Sam 16, is continued into 17. The son of a commoner, a "nobody," David defeats Goliath and wins the offered reward: wealth, the princess, and higher status for his father and his father's house. The promised marriage with Merab is rescinded, but David is transferred from his father's house and family to Saul's, which includes Jonathan. As was the case with Samuel in the house of Eli, David is placed into the leader's family before that family's demise.[18] If the combined story was a unified original, the marriage to Michal is a sensible continuation of this narrative.

For Alexander Rofé (1987)[19] the LXXB version is an abridgement which harmonizes the basic story with the previous and following chapters in 1 Samuel, for example, by eliminating Eliab's rebuke, Jonathan's premature appearance, and Merab.[20] The original account was no more than a fairy tale about an underdog, an unknown shepherd against a famous warrior. The story was later reworked theologically: David's faith defeats the uncircumcised Philistine who had taunted God and Israel.[21] The biblical story developed from the fairy tale shows signs of being very late in its great length and in the portrait of an idealized David as a paragon of virtue.[22] The Goliath episode is not referred to later in the David narrative, not even when David flees to Gath in 1 Sam 21. Furthermore, the passage about Elhanan's slaying of Goliath in 2 Sam 21 was allowed to remain in the tradition. These factors plus linguistic evidence lead Rofé to the conclusion that the current story is a creation of the fourth century, with David as an archetypal future savior of Israel.[23]

Rofé contends that this messianic expectation is characteristic of the Second Commonwealth. Earlier biblical passages (e.g., Obad 1:21) refer to "saviors" without specifying their Davidic nature. Most references to David in prophetic literature (Hos 3:5; Jer 30:8–9; Ezek 34:23–24 and 37:23–25) are late redactional insertions. For example, in Ezek 34 the original text (1–16, 31) states that since the shepherds failed to tend the sheep, YHWH will do it himself; YHWH's appointment of David to tend them (17–30) is a late addition. Deutero- and Trito-Isaiah consider YHWH the redeemer, with the Davidic covenant realized in the faithful people (Isa 55:1–5).[24] Furthermore, argues Rofé, the redactional interpolations refer not to a descendant

18. Ibid., 59–61.
19. A. Rofé, "The Battle of David and Goliath: Folklore, Theology, Eschatology," in *Judaic Perspectives on Ancient Israel* (ed. J. Neusner, B. Levine, E. Frerichs; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987).
20. Ibid., 119–22.
21. Ibid., 117–18.
22. Ibid., 126.
23. Ibid., 127–39.
24. Ibid., 139–41.

of David, but to David himself — that is, David *redivivus*. This is consistent with the postexilic period, when the failure of Davidic descendant-based messianism — the "Branch" — during the time of Zerubbabel turned messianic hopes in a metahistorical and eschatological direction. Rofé cites as other examples of postexilic *redivivi* Elijah, Enoch, the dry bones of Ezekiel, and the suffering servant of Isa 53. Thus the historical context of the Bible's David and Goliath story is the postexilic hope for the return of David, the ideal savior king who would destroy the evil oppressors of Israel.[25] As the uncut stone in Dan 2 destroys the wicked empires, so David's stone topples Goliath.[26]

I conclude this survey with a recent suggestion as to the origin of the David and Goliath duel: Graeme Auld's theory (1996) that the story of Elhanan was the kernel to which two separate stories, the LXXB and non-LXXB versions) were transferred to David and added in order to "bind the story more closely to the book as a whole by adding to the comparisons and contrasts between David and Saul . . . a big story grown from a very tiny seed."[27]

Whether the Goliath episode in its current form was an early or late development, the case for the existence of a heroic David tradition is not diminished. An extensive body of tradition must have grown between the fairy tale (to use Rofé's term) or the romantic epic (Jason's) and the idea of a David *redivivus* or ideal king modeled on David. A larger-than-life image of David in the popular imagination would encourage belief in his appearance later as a revivified savior. His other adventures and those of his warriors would have made him an attractive model.

The Sword of Goliath

One narrative detail has attracted little attention. In 1 Sam 17:54 David deposits the head of Goliath in Jerusalem and keeps Goliath's weapons in his own tent. The Jerusalem reference is obviously a puzzling anachronism, and his appropriation of Goliath's arms is at odds with another story. When David later flees from Saul and stops at Nob for food (1 Sam 21:1–10), he is without a weapon. The priest of the local shrine, Ahimelek, tells him to take the sword of Goliath the Philistine which is kept wrapped behind the ephod, " 'for there is none other here but it.' David replied, 'There is none like it;

25. Ibid., 142–44.
26. Ibid., 138.
27. G. Auld, "Re-reading Samuel (Historically): 'Etwas Mehr Nichtwissen,' " in *The Origins of the Ancient Israelite States* (ed. V. Fritz and P. Davies; JSOT Supplement 228; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 166f.

give it to me.' " (21:10) This unique sword is inexplicably never mentioned again in the Bible! But the reference, like other heroic fragments, cries out for speculation about the role of this sword in heroic accounts of David's career.

How did it get to Nob? The setting of the tale of the four heroes (2 Sam 23:15–22) who slew four large Philistines is probably Nob.[28] The first Philistine, the one who came close to killing David, is named "Yishbi-benob." The text (vv. 15–16) reads: " . . . and David went down, and his men with him, and they fought the Philistines, and David grew weary. And Yishbi-benob, of the offspring of the Raphah . . . thought to smite David." The element *benob* may not be part of the Philistine's name, but a location, that is, "at Nob." Or the text may be corrupt, with words missing; i.e., read " . . . and David grew weary and they stopped at Nob (*wayešebu benob*). [Name missing] of the offspring of the Raphah . . . " The second duel (v. 18) involving the hero Sibbekai and the Philistine Saph is also located at Gob ("there was *another* battle at Gob"; 1 Chr 20:4 reads "Gezer"), as is the third, between Elhanan and Goliath (v. 19; "there was *another* battle at Gob"). Gob is an otherwise unknown place. The fourth duel, between Jonathan son of Shim'ai and the nameless Philistine with twelve fingers and toes, is at Gath (v. 20; all four Philistines were from Gath in the summary statement in v. 22). Gob may easily be a scribal error for Nob. The reference to Gath in the fourth episode may be an error by attraction from v. 22, confusing the warrior's birthplace with the battle site. If Elhanan killed Goliath in a battle near Nob and dedicated the defeated warrior's sword at the local shrine, it would explain the tradition of the sword being kept behind the ephod by the priests of Nob, conveniently available for David.

The sword of the defeated giant — it makes no difference who killed him in the "original" legend, Elhanan or David — is taken by the future king. In the underlying tale, or in some stage of its development, is the sword just a trophy, or can it be a mark of royalty (cf. Excalibur)? Does it allow its owner to be victorious and perform heroic deeds? Is it magical? Does it protect its owner? "There is none like it!" The answers must be in material that is missing from the biblical account. Certainly the last few sentences are wildly speculative in the absence of solid clues, but a unique weapon given to a hero in a tale of adventure must surely arouse curiosity.

Significant swords, real and imagined, appear in later Jewish tradition. In 1 Macc 3:12 Judah the Hasmonean leader takes the sword of the Seleucid general Apollonius, whom he had defeated and killed, and is said to have used it for the rest of his life. The same Judah reports a waking vision

28. So, e.g., Halpern, *David's Secret Demons,* 285.

in 2 Macc 15:11–16 in which the former high priest Onias prays for the community and introduces the prophet Jeremiah, who gives Judah a golden sword, the gift of God, with which to crush his enemies.

The sword of Goliath is not the subject of political or theological comment in the text of 1 Samuel. There is no religious or propagandistic motive for its appearance. It must be an authentic detail from an underlying story, but we have no way of pinpointing its role or meaning. It is a fragment of a heroic tradition associated with David, but not without problems. The sword of 1 Sam 21 explicitly had belonged to Goliath the Philistine whom David slew (21:10: "whom you smote in the Valley of Elah," says Ahimelek to David). The text, as it stands, follows 1 Sam 17 and ignores the Elhanan tradition. Of course the phrase, "whom you smote in the Valley of Elah," may be a redactional comment that links the sword to David's victory rather than to Elhanan.

If Elhanan was the original slayer of Goliath, and if the context of his victory was the period of David's kingship, then the sword could not have been David's on the eve of his outlaw period. There are a number of possibilities: (1) The sword could have belonged to the anonymous Philistine whom David slew, and to whom the name of Goliath was later attached from the Elhanan story. (2) The Nob story came into the tradition later than did the tale of David and Goliath. The author of the Nob episode associated both Goliath and his sword with David and simply chose to disregard the earlier story involving Elhanan. (3) If Dtr introduced the sword in 1 Sam 21 in order to have continuity in the narrative by connecting a detail from David's victory over Goliath with his flight from Saul, why did he leave the contradictions and why did he not expand on the role of the sword? Dtr probably just reproduced stories, or fragments of stories, that he found in the larger tradition. (4) If we are dealing with independent stories, or *logoi,* then their chronological arrangement by Dtr may have been altered or invented; attempts to impose a logical sequence or to locate a particular story at a fixed point in David's career are meaningless.

The snippet of text about Elhanan (2 Sam 21:19) regards Goliath's mighty spear — "like a weaver's beam" — as his main weapon; there is nothing about a sword. The more detailed description of Goliath's arms in 1 Sam 17:5–7 similarly makes no mention of a sword, referring instead to the spear (*ḥanit*) like a weaver's beam with an iron head or blade weighing six hundred shekels. Here the giant also has a bronze javelin (*kidon*) slung over his shoulders. But when David kills the giant with his own weapon (17:51), it is the sword (*ḥereb*), drawn from a scabbard. To provide the missing sword some translate *kidon* (commonly "javelin") as "scimitar"; but that is unlikely since in 17:45 the text recognizes the difference and

lists the giant's weapons as *ḥereb, ḥanit,* and *kidon.* Neither is this conclusive. All of these weapon references in 1 Sam 17 are in the LXXB text. Verses 17:45 and 47 do mention the *ḥereb,* but they are most likely part of the theological addition to the original story: "You come at me with a sword and spear and javelin, but I come at you in the name of YHWH of Hosts. . . . And all the assembly will know that it is not with sword and spear that YHWH saves. . . . " This editorial expansion, in addition to giving the story a religious slant, also recognizes the problem of the missing sword and adds it in order to reconcile the beginning of the story with the end. The non-LXXB version has David killing the Philistine with a stone, stating that David had no sword (17:50). In the continuation of the non-LXXB account David brings the Philistine's head to his interview with Saul (17:57), and there is no explanation of what he used to decapitate his victim.

Of course we are dealing with legends that may have had many forms, and the origins and fate of the unique sword are muddled. The uncertainties are sufficient to obscure the original context of the sword and its association with David. At all events, the tradition that we have — that was briefly cited but not developed in the biblical account — is that David came into possession of the sword of Goliath, and that there was none like it. The citation points to a more extensive and more important — though not recoverable — role played by this unique sword in some early tradition.

David as a Rogue

The evidence for underlying heroic traditions about David is compelling, and those traditions might be regarded as secular, if one can distinguish secular from religious material in early Israel. By secular I mean prose or poetry that may have included references to divinities, as in the Homeric epics, but that was not systematically edited from a particular religious perspective. Jason's *Ethnopoetics,* a handbook on folkloristic terminology, defines various modes, each with its own set of genres.[29] Thus the numinous mode includes myth, sacred legend, ritual text, and etiological and etymological legends. The genres of the marvelous mode are various types of fairy tale, including the heroic. The realistic mode's genres are novella and different types of epic: historical, national, universal, romantic, and mythic. Epics are generally realistic in their human characters and historical settings, but they tend to include some material from the other modes. The principal actors are men, usually warriors, but the gods do appear, even if their purpose is

29. H. Jason, *Ethnopoetics: A Multilingual Terminology* (Jerusalem: Israel Ethnographic Society, 1975), 41ff.

not to teach or represent religious truths or rituals as it is in the numinous mode. As we have seen, Jason labels the David and Goliath story romantic epic, a subcategory of historical epic.

From the compilers of 1 and 2 Chronicles, who produced a whitewashed version of the life and times of David by eliminating his outlawry, usurpation, crimes, and embarrassments, to modern readers who agonize over the moral failings of David and his men, there appears to be a reluctance to consider that the embarrassing material which Dtr left in the narrative may not have been there initially to drive home moral lessons or serve some propagandistic purpose. Epics, novellas, and popular heroic tales revel in lovable rogues, violence, intrigue, and sex, even, or perhaps especially, when its heroes are involved. The heroic qualities of David could only be enhanced in this literature by his outlawry and his court scandals. Think only of the traditions of the Homeric heroes or King Arthur and his knights of the Round Table: Usurpations, adultery, and the treachery of friends and relatives did not diminish the image of Agamemnon, Achilles, Arthur, Lancelot, and their companions. In secular heroic tales David could extort from Nabal and marry his widow, put away Michal and so have no heirs from the blood of Saul, cynically allow the Gibeonites to exterminate the remaining Saulides, satisfy his lust by stealing the wife of one of his chief warriors, and mercilessly order the cuckold's death. He could suffer — or benefit — from rape and murder within the royal family, from assassinations within the military establishment, and from a humiliating revolt by his own son Absalom. None of these things turn an epic hero into a villain. The unflattering nature of the material demonstrates neither its objectivity nor its historicity, *contra* Rost, and its incompatibility with somebody's more ideal image of David does not make it a deliberate counter-version to Dtr's portrait of a royal prototype, as Van Seters argues for the Succession History.

David was a reward-seeking brash opportunist in the non-LXXB version of the Goliath story and in parts of the subsequent narrative. For the hand of Michal in LXXB he doubled the number of battlefield foreskin trophies required by Saul. He cleverly avoided arrest, once with the complicity of Michal (1 Sam 19) and twice with the help of Jonathan (1 Sam 19 and 20). Realizing his error at initially seeking refuge at Gath, he saved his own life by playing mad (1 Sam 21). His gang of outlaws extorted goods from farmers like Nabal, a stereotypical churl and fool. Even before Nabal's death it is clear that his soon-to-be widow Abigail was attracted to David, and he married her when Nabal died (1 Sam 25). David eventually was granted asylum by Achish of Gath, and he became a mercenary for the Philistines while slyly helping the Judaeans (1 Sam 27). His adultery with Bathsheba, the murder of Uriah, and the botched cover-up were overreaching acts with

nemesis-like consequences. He was ruthless toward his real and potential enemies, both foreigners (2 Sam 8) and the surviving members of Saul's family (2 Sam 21). David's crafty but immoral slaughter of innocent witnesses to his deception of his Philistine employers (1 Sam 27) draws no adverse comment in the text.

These are traditions about a powerful man, clever, cruel, and usually effective, but also one who felt the repercussions of his *hubris*. They may constitute a realistic portrait (as for Rost and others), but they are better understood as literary devices that paint an imaginary picture. Agamemnon, Achilles, Arthur, and Lancelot are not rendered real by descriptions of their negative qualities. Neither is David. In the following example we get different but interesting results if we look at David through the glass of history or legend.

"The Political Import of David's Marriages," a fascinating article by Jon Levenson and Baruch Halpern, focuses on two of David's wives, Abigail and Ahinoam,[30] in a piece of risky and risque scholarship that the authors even called "speculative, and quite possibly incorrect."[31] Caleb (the contemporary of Joshua) was the head of the Judaeans and was associated with Hebron (Josh 15:13). Nabal is called a Calebite in 1 Sam 25:3. David's marriage to Nabal's wife gives him a claim to Hebron, usurping Nabal's position as clan head. David is first declared king at Hebron. What goes around comes around. Nabal's real name was Ithra or Jether the Jezreelite (Jezreel was a town near Hebron), which is what we should read for "Ithra the Israelite" in 2 Sam 17:25 and "Jether the Ishmaelite" in 1 Chr 2:17. When Absalom later declared his rebellion in Hebron (2 Sam 15:7–12), he appointed Amasa (7:25) as his general. Now Amasa was the son of this Ithra and Abigail, the sister of Zeruiah the mother of Joab. But in the genealogy of 1 Chr 2:12ff. Zeruiah and Abigail (wife of Jether and mother of Amasa) are David's sisters, all children of Jesse. By taking Nabal's wife Abigail, in order to gain political advantage, David married his own sister (!) after her husband's death, for which she and David were partially responsible.

At about the same time David married another Jezreelite woman, Ahinoam (1 Sam 25:43). The only other Ahinoam in the Bible is Saul's wife, Ahinoam the daughter of Ahimaaz (1 Sam 14:50). In a curious passage (1 Sam 20:30) Saul accuses his son Jonathan of foolishly siding with David and protecting him: "You son of a rebellious lass" (reading *na'arat hamardut* with LXX, 4QSamB, and Josephus, *Ant.* vi.237), he says, "I know you favor the son of Jesse to your shame and the shame of your mother's nakedness."

30. *JBL* 99 (1980): 507–18.
31. Ibid., 508.

The last term, *'erwat 'imeka,* refers in the Bible to illicit sexual behavior (as in "uncovering one's nakedness"). Why this slur on Ahinoam as a rebellious woman and the remark about her immorality? Levenson and Halpern's answer: Jonathan's mother was Saul's wife Ahinoam, the same woman whom David later married. The young military officer David had seduced Ahinoam; he had stolen his master's wife, to Saul's apparent knowledge. Later, as a fugitive, David somehow got her to join him as his wife, in a sense replacing Saul's daughter Michal, whose marriage to David Saul had annulled, with Saul's queen. This is what the prophet Nathan had in mind when he castigated David for his adultery with Bathsheba (2 Sam 12:8f.): "I [YHWH] gave you the house of your master and the wives of your master. . . . Why have you despised the word of YHWH to do evil in his eyes?" As punishment (12:11f.): "I will take your wives before your eyes and give them to your fellow, and he shall lie with your wives in the eyes of this sun. You acted secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel and before the sun." The prophecy was fulfilled when Absalom publicly humbled David's concubines on the roof of his palace (2 Sam 16). Absalom had previously murdered Amnon, the son of David and Ahinoam, for the rape of his sister Tamar.

The plot thickens. One of the Thirty heroes is Eliam the son of Ahitophel the Gilonite (2 Sam 23:34); as Absalom's advisor, Ahitophel is the one who urged him to take David's concubines (2 Sam 16:21). Bathsheba was the daughter of an Eliam (2 Sam 11:3; they are called Batshua and Amiel in 1 Chr 3:5). If this is the same Eliam as Ahitophel's son, Bathsheba's grandfather may be seen as avenging her shame through his advice to Absalom.

The surprising thing is that Levenson and Halpern are willing to take all this seriously as a representation of historical reality! They suggest that the rivalry between Amnon and Absalom goes back to rival mothers. David used Ahinoam to establish his candidacy for the kingship, while Abigail brought support from the Calebites at Hebron. Together with David's ties to the Philistines, Gilead, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Gibeonites, Tyre, and Geshur (whose princess Maakah was Absalom's mother), his wives' connections allowed him to surround and engulf Saul's kingdom. The text of 1–2 Samuel suppressed the uncomplimentary information that David had married his sister and stolen Saul's wife.

To read this as history or elaboration on historical events, as Levenson and Halpern do, would mean not only to posit the suppression of information, but also to accept many coincidences, to make assumptions about the matching identities of the characters, and to rely on the genealogies of usually tendentious 1 Chronicles to clarify information in 1–2 Samuel. Only in Chronicles are Abigail and Zeruiah David's sisters. However, if we take

this material as elements of heroic tales rather than history, the character identities and narrative coincidences would stretch the imagination far less, especially when themes of outrage and revenge are embedded in the stories. Levenson and Halpern have indeed pointed to new narrative possibilities. In the realm of legend and story telling it should not be difficult to accept among the tales of a great fighter — who has already won the king's daughter with two hundred scalps of sorts collected in battle — having an affair with his king's wife (cf. Lancelot, Guinevere, and Arthur) and stealing her away (cf. Paris and Helen, the legend of Gyges). The spouse of a grumpy farmer falls in love with a dashing outlaw chief. A king seduces the beautiful wife of one of his most loyal warriors — she may be the daughter of another elite soldier and the granddaughter of an influential politician — and arranges for the husband's death after a failed cover-up of the affair and the resultant pregnancy. Nemesis follows these acts of *hubris* in ironic ways. The cast of characters includes queens and commoners, various children of the royal household, advisors who undercut each other (Ahitophel and Hushai), and brave soldiers. The various explicit and implied narrative elements which form a continuity in the current text may come from completely separate stories or cycles of stories about the heroic and sometimes rascally David that ranged from adventures to tragic consequences.

There *could* be some historical facts behind some of the stories, but just as easily, and more likely in my opinion, the stories were the product of folklore or legend. The details of such adventures and liaisons, after all, are not the kind of information that one would put into royal annals or other official documents. They smack more of Herodotus's *logoi* collection and Suetonius's gossip mongering than of the kind of information we get from Near Eastern stelae and clay tablets and Thucydides' more sober history. As we have found in the passages concerning David's warriors and the sword of Goliath, we have full narratives for some of the scandal stories, but for others only abbreviated references or unexplained allusions to juicy stories.

Samuel, Saul, and Gad

Recognition of underlying epic or heroic literature also demands a re-appraisal of Samuel's role in the stories. The source critics often suggest a later prophetic supplement as responsible for most of the material about Samuel that portrays him as a successful prophet, priest, judge, kingmaker, critic of Saul, and anointer of David. Some of his speeches are certainly Deuteronomic. But was Samuel's career entirely superimposed on the heroic narratives about Saul and David, or was he already present in some of them?

Seers play advisory roles in the Homeric epics, and Merlin's actions are central in kingmaking and directing events in the Arthurian legends.

Some of the Samuel material must have been in the early heroic traditions of Saul and David. Otherwise why would the biblical text describe Samuel as a seer in 1 Sam 9:9 and feel it necessary to comment that seers were in those days what we now call prophets? A seer whose priestly lore was learned at the feet of his master and virtual foster father Eli, who had the capacity for secret knowledge that could locate lost objects (1 Sam 9), who could wield the divine spirit for both positive and negative results on those upon whom it fell (1 Sam 19), and whose ghost could be consulted long after his death (1 Sam 28) is not out of place in a heroic narrative. While Samuel's eloquent representation of YHWH's Deuteronomistic scheme of history (1 Sam 12) is no doubt a late veneer, his role as agent of the divine or occult powers of El or YHWH in the turbulent years of the incipient monarchy could appropriately belong in the popular tales. His backing of Saul and subsequent quarrel with him, and the secret anointment and prediction that the outsider David would overthrow Saul's dynasty may not, along with all the rest of the biblical account, be historical, and these particular actions of Samuel are certainly presented as anti-Saul and pro-David propaganda by Dtr. Samuel's role as YHWH's prophetic agent who gives divine approval and disapproval to kings is a Deuteronomic touch; that does not, however, preclude the presence of a famous seer at some stage in the development of the legends.

Balaam son of Beor appears in Num 22–24 as a seer hired by the Moabites to curse Israel. The delightful story features a talking ass, an angel, and intended curses turned into blessings. The well-known eighth-century Aramaic inscription from Deir 'Alla in northern Jordan cites a prophecy of this ancient seer, who seems to have been familiar to local traditions. The author of Num 22–24 incorporated him into a tale about Moses and the Israelites. We see below (chap. 4) that the sage Merlin was taken by Geoffrey of Monmouth from an early independent tradition to play a role in the "history" of King Arthur's ascent to the throne. It is within the realm of likelihood that Samuel (literally "the name of El") was an early seer, in fact or in legend, who was worked into the stories of Saul and David. Certainly the etymology of his name as "the requested one" and perhaps parts of the story of his birth in 1 Sam 1 appear to be usurped from Saul. Much less ambiguous is the tale in 1 Sam 19:19–24 as a wonderful example of legendary creativity involving the occult powers of a seer/prophet. Two groups of messengers and then Saul himself try to arrest David but are rendered helpless (i.e., they prophesy) when Samuel casts the spirit of God upon them. The episode gives rise to the derisive line, "Is Saul, too, among the prophets?"

The text is one of two etiologies for the same phrase (cf. 1 Sam 10:11); Samuel is involved with both. It doesn't matter when the stories arose; this is not an argument for their early origin. The point is that at some stage in the development of the heroic literature about David and Saul the prophet Samuel was worked into the tradition. Similarly, the famous scene in 1 Sam 28 where the woman of En Dor conjures up the ghost of Samuel has been insinuated into the narrative. As in the story of 1 Sam 19, Dtr fashioned the text to be anti-Saul and pro-David, but the basic tale of information being sought from a ghost brought up from the netherworld (cf. Homer's *Odyssey,* Book XI) was probably an old dramatic piece that became part of the story associated with Saul and Samuel before the Deuteronomic redaction.

There are many heroic elements in the legends of Saul. A story of his special birth and naming appears to have been later usurped by Samuel (1 Sam 1; the etymology of Samuel's name, "asked of God," in 1 Sam 1:20 fits Saul — literally "the requested one" — rather than Samuel, whose name means "the name of God"). The clever military strategy of Jonathan and the vow of Saul that almost cost Jonathan his life (1 Sam 14) have a heroic quality, and the summary list of Saul's victories over Moab, Ammon, Edom, Zobah, the Philistines, and Amalek (1 Sam 14:46–48) is contrary to the Deuteronomist's negative view of Saul and presupposes longer tales of his successful ventures. The list may be historical or schematic. (Compare David's victories over Philistines, Moab, Ammon, Zobah, and Edom in 2 Sam 5 and 8. Might Saulide successes have been usurped by David? See below, chap. 7.) Saul and Jonathan are the focus of the poetic lament cited from the Scroll of Yashar in 2 Sam 1. Saul's anointment by a seer, his madness, and his struggle for authority against this sometimes bloodthirsty seer may also be part of an early heroic tradition, though the two tales involving this struggle for authority (in 1 Sam 13 and 15) are more likely to be propagandistic insertions by Dtr.

While portions of the story of the lost asses and Samuel's selection of Saul as king in 1 Sam 9 and 10 have been recognized as folk tales (see below, chap. 7), contemporary scholars have tended to assign most of the material involving Saul and Samuel to a prophetic stratum of the text or to Dtr.[32] The emphasis on Saul's failure in anticipation of David's success is very strong in 1 Samuel. The loss or suppression of positive independent traditions about Saul's birth and accomplishments leaves a limited portrait

32. See Bruce Birch, "The Development of the Tradition on the Anointing of Saul in I Sam 9:1–16," *JBL* 90 (1971): 55–68, for folkloristic and prophetic elements. Van Seters, *In Search of History,* chap. 8 on the Books of Samuel, is the major advocate of Dtr's authorship.

of the man regarded by the Bible as the founder of the monarchy but treated mainly as a foil for David.

Among the members of David's gang — and subsequently his royal court — were a priest, Abiathar, and a seer, Gad, to be joined later by Zadok and Nathan. We have only a few details about these figures, some of which may be overlaid with religious or royal propaganda. Again, a more extensive heroic background is suggested. Gad's advice to the outlaw David to change his hiding place (1 Sam 22:5) indicates the mantic role he must have played; his role as advisor and pipeline to divine knowledge — other stories feature Abiathar and his ephod in this role — must have been as important to the heroic tradition as the military feats of David's Three and Thirty heroes.

Conclusions

Whether there were many heroic traditions or one, whether poetry or prose, whether oral or written, through such popular literature the general population came to know and picture David. The covenant which guaranteed continuity for the Davidic dynasty was important for political and religious writers who produced royal or prophetic propaganda. The projection of an ideal king, however, could not be based merely on covenant rhetoric; it focused on David, already a model leader in the popular imagination. In the Hellenistic period Moses, that other biblical figure of epic proportions, was the model for an eschatological prophet awaited by some Jewish groups, but their messianic pronouncements were vague as to whether this would be a prophet like Moses or Moses *redivivus*.[33] Similarly, the rhetoric on a Davidic savior wavered between an ideal descendant of David and a David *redivivus*.

The hypothesis that most parts of the biblical story of David are more or less faithful renderings of historiographical texts from the tenth century that survived until the Babylonian exile is untenable. There are too many folkloric elements, narrative breaks, and story variations. As do the tales of Moses and the Judges, the David narrative appears to draw on heroic literature and legends rather than archival or other official sources. The present biblical narrative of David's rise and reign is an arrangement of these materials with an overlay of religious and national ideology.

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33. See S. Isser, "Dositheus, Jesus, and a Moses Aretalogy," in *Christianity, Judaism, and Other Greco-Roman Cults* (ed. J. Neusner; M. Smith Fs.; Part 4, Studies in Judaism in Late Antiquity 12; Leiden, Brill, 1975), 167–89.

The hypothesis that it was all an invention of the Persian period is equally untenable. There are too many abbreviated and fragmentary references to texts, people, and accounts that make sense only if the audience was familiar with the preexistent traditions to which these referred. That the books of Samuel–Kings were completed in the Persian period is a plausible argument, but estimations of the degree to which earlier traditions were used and what kind of traditions they were is the key to any knowledge of the preexilic period.

In the case of the story of David, while some of the characters may have been historical figures or reminiscences of historical figures, the surviving traditions are not the kind of sources we can use to reconstruct events. But that does not render them valueless as historical sources. The Homeric epics may not have been historical either, but they became popular and eventually informed the education and culture of generations of Greeks. So also the legends of David and his time must have grown to provide for the Israelite or Judaean population during the monarchical age not only popular literature but paradigmatic times and figures as well: a golden age and its heroes. An attempt to trace the development of this material is also an attempt to recover a significant aspect of Israelite — or at least Judaean — popular culture of the preexilic period. This task for the historian is as important as the attempt to recover the political history of the united monarchy.

Chapter 4

Other Heroic Traditions

Homer

Complexes of heroic literature in specific societies develop in unique ways and under the influence of unique historical circumstances. Nevertheless it may be methodologically instructive to examine the development of other, unrelated bundles of heroic tradition. In the introduction to his classical translation of *The Iliad of Homer* (1951), for example, Richmond Lattimore offered a useful description about the development of Greek epic poetry. He wrote about the Trojan War: "From the event, the legend, and from the legend, Homer; but between the event and Homer, we see now, the legend had time to grow."[1]

The "event" gave rise to prose saga and verse in oral form. In their telling and retelling, tales were changed. Certain parts of the legends (Menelaus's and the Achaeans' attempt to recapture Helen, characters like Achilles and Patroclus) remained basic to the story, but marginal material was brought in. Selection occurred within limits, but in time "the tradition must . . . have fixed certain events in the story in all the authority of fact."[2] Homer — whatever this name represents: writer, collector, redactor — could emphasize or develop certain episodes or characters, but could not contradict the legends which had become basic to the story.

Lattimore suggested five stages from the "event" to the final development of the literature:[3]

1. The event
2. Recording and elaboration of the event in hearsay and oral poetry
3. Formation of a fixed legend and, perhaps at the same time, putting it into hexameter verse

1. R. Lattimore, trans. and intro., *The Iliad of Homer* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 20.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., 27.

4. Composition of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* in the eighth century and the recognition of these epics as authoritative
5. Completion of the Trojan War story in epic cycles through use of pre-Homeric material not exhausted by Homer

We must note that between the "event" (a hypothetical memorable conflict of some sort involving people from Greece and Asia Minor) and "Homer" there were the lengthy historical and literary Dark Ages, marked by invasions and migrations that ended Bronze Age Greek civilization and preceded the beginnings of classical culture. How much knowledge (or hearsay), not to mention writing, was lost during the intervening centuries? When the "fixed legend" was formed, how many of its components were new inventions that had no ties to survivals from the Bronze Age? These "pre-Homeric" components, whether old or new, were tales and legends, not historical accounts.

King Arthur

Philip Davies remarked that he "suspects that the figure of King David is about as historical as King Arthur."[4] This is a fortuitous comment, because the Arthurian literature is another excellent illustration of the growth of a heroic tradition. The setting of its narrative is, in fact, similar to that of David, as is its development from legend to what claimed to be historiography. It is worth a digression to view how modern scholarship traces its stages. The picture is far more complex than the brief summary presented below. For the full account I have used the works of Richard W. Barber, *King Arthur, in Legend and History* (1974), and *King Arthur: Hero and Legend* (1986), on which the following summary is based.[5]

The Dark Ages of British history have left no reliable contemporary accounts, but an outline has emerged. In the fifth century C.E. the Romans withdrew from Britain. Their system of government was replaced by small states whose kings fought among themselves. The Saxons, from the northern European mainland, had been persistent raiders of the British coast, but with the Roman withdrawal they began to settle in Britain, controlling much of the country by the end of the sixth century.

An eighth/ninth-century text, *Historia Brittonum* (wrongly ascribed to the sixth-century Welsh monk Gildas) refers to Arthur as a victorious military commander among the kings of the Britons, who fought against the

4. See above, chap. 2, note 61.

5. R. Barber, *King Arthur, in Legend and History* (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman & Littlefield, 1974); *King Arthur: Hero and Legend* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986).

Saxons in twelve battles. Specifically, in the eighth battle he carried the portrait of the Virgin Mary on his shoulders, and in the twelfth, at Mt. Badon, he led an attack in which he personally slew 960 of the enemy. A revision of this text produced in Wales between 875 and 925 made Arthur the greatest leader among the Britons in these battles, even if there were others of more noble birth. This revised text, in describing the marvelous sites of Britain, refers to a stone with magical properties bearing the footprint of Arthur's dog, and a tomb believed to be that of Arthur's son Amr, whom Arthur had killed and buried. These reports point to a growing tradition about Arthur whose details we do not know.

Thirteenth-century manuscripts of Welsh poems written from the sixth century onward attribute heroic and supernatural deeds to Arthur. The most famous of these are the *Black Book of Carmarthen* and the *Book of Taliesin.* In these poems (ten mention Arthur) Arthur fights a hag and goes on an expedition to the Otherworld to seize a magic cauldron; here we are introduced to his follower Cai (i.e., Kay) and his ship called Prydwen. One poem speaks of Arthur's grave, "concealed till Doomsday." Other collections of popular tales involve Arthur's court (governed by specific regulations), the daughter of a giant, a magical boar, and a list of warriors with exaggerated skills.

A text actually written by Gildas in the sixth century, *On the Ruins of Britain,* has no reference to Arthur but mentions Mt. Badon as the last British victory against the Saxons. Thus the legends were built upon at least one allegedly historical event, but the silence of Gildas with regard to Arthur, in a work perhaps less than a half century after Mt. Badon, raises questions about Arthur's connection to the battle mentioned in the later *Historia Brittonum.* The *Annales Cambriae* (Annals of Wales), whose compilation began in the eighth century, refer to Arthur's bearing the cross upon his shoulders at Mt. Badon and add an event dated twenty-one years after that battle: the death of Arthur and Medraut (i.e., Mordred) at the battle of Camlann.

Barber, citing E. A. Thompson, emphasizes the devastation and population dislocations, already described by Gildas, that occurred as a result of the Roman withdrawal, civil wars among the British, and the Saxon invasions and settlement. Knowledge of the past was a casualty, and details became obscure within a few generations.[6] The subsequent growth of Arthur legends was grounded only on the survival of a list of battles and the name of a hero connected with two of them. Whatever Arthur was historically is lost.

John Van Seters's comment is most apt: Tales do not grow into legends which create the hero; rather, the reverse is true, that once a hero is established,

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6. Barber, *King Arthur: Hero and Legend,* 10, citing E. A. Thompson, *Saint Germanus of Auxerre and the End of Roman Britain* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press, 1984), 114–15.

tales and legends are associated with him.[7] We return to this point in reference to David; meanwhile, it explains the Arthurian tradition. As this tradition began to glorify Arthur — one twelfth-century report describes the belief that Arthur did not die and would return — certain Christian texts began to deflate him (compare Van Seters's views on the negative picture of David in 2 Samuel). In several Lives of the Saints (Cadoc, Carannog, Padarn, Gildas) written in the eleventh and twelfth centuries Arthur is an avaricious, petty tyrant.

Such is the background for Geoffrey of Monmouth's monumental *History of the Kings of Britain* (ca. 1135), the work that produced the "fixed legend" (in the sense of Lattimore's terminology) of Arthur.[8] In the form of a chronicle but actually a romance, the *History* has been seen as a conscious attempt to create a national epic. In twelve books it covers the Britons and their rulers from their mythical origins contemporary with the Trojan War to the medieval King Cadwallader. But five of these books (VII–XI) focus on prophecies concerning Arthur, the circumstances leading to his reign, and Arthur himself. Barber sees this as an attempt "to provide the Britons with an emperor-hero to whose golden age they could look back with pride."[9] Alexander the Great and Charlemagne may have served as models, and the anachronistic description of Arthur's court may reflect the twelfth-century Norman courts or even the splendors of Constantinople.[10]

Geoffrey claims in *History* I.1 that he was given an ancient book (subsequently lost, if it ever existed), which he translated into Latin, and which was the source of much of his information. In Book VII of his *History* he incorporates the prophecy of Merlin from a work he had written earlier in his career. Geoffrey gives Merlin, a figure based on the ancient bard and prophet Myrddin, a supernatural birth and makes him not only prophesy about Arthur's coming but also participate in the sexual deception that led to Arthur's birth. Many of the characters may come from the legendary tradition, but Geoffrey fleshes them out and either reworks old stories or invents new ones to create the plot, which describes Arthur's kingship, defeat of the Saxons, establishment of a court, imperialistic conquests, and tragic betrayal by Mordred.

Besides the earlier legends Geoffrey brings into his account diverse elements which represent both his own background and the complexity of Britain's cultural history. The origin of the Britons, traced back to the great

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7. Van Seters, *In Search of History,* 306.
8. Geoffrey of Monmouth, *History of the Kings of Britain* (trans. S. Evans; New York: Dutton, 1958).
9. Barber, *King Arthur: Hero and Legend,* 35.
10. Ibid.

grandson of the Trojan hero Aeneas, is pure myth, an attempt to connect Britain with the Greek and Latin epics. Frequent synchronisms of British and biblical characters reveal Geoffrey's Christian education. A survivor of Saxon treachery kills the Saxon chief Hengist as Samuel cut Agag the Amalekite to pieces (VIII.1–7), and Aurelius Ambrosius treated Saxons at York who surrendered as Joshua treated the Gibeonites (VIII.8). The long list of rulers indicates access at least to dynastic lists which, when combined with Roman texts concerning Britain, provide some actual historical information for the period of the Roman Empire. The interesting interplay between Christianity and paganism is acknowledged. In Book VIII, for example, are descriptions both of the construction of Stonehenge from stones of the "Giants' Dance" and of the Easter festival at London.

The *History of the Kings of Britain* was an immediate success. Despite the criticism by some contemporaries that this was romance and not history, the book was immensely popular — over two hundred manuscripts are extant. The numerous post-Geoffrey expansions of the Arthur tradition drew on what was essentially now a fixed outline of the legend. Many readers who are familiar with the more fully developed Arthurian tradition do not realize what was in Geoffrey's basic outline and what was not. For example, in Book IX.4 of the *History* the new King Arthur has a shield called Pridwen with the image of Mary on the inside, a lance called Ren, and a sword Caliburn forged in the mysterious land of Avalon and gave to Arthur. Excalibur, as the sword drawn from the stone and returned to the lake, is a later literary development. Most of the new details appear in the late twelfth-century French versions of Maistre Wace, Layamon, Chretien de Troyes, and Robert de Boron, from which the "Vulgate Cycle" was formed. Perhaps the pinnacle of the Arthurian tradition was reached in the fifteenth century by the publication of Thomas Malory's *Le Mort d'Arthur,* the text through which Arthur is known to most readers today.

Mt. Amesbury (Stonehenge), London, and Caerleon appear as major sites in Geoffrey's *History,* but the glittering Camelot debuts only in the later French versions. Gawain, Arthur's defender and companion, is prominent in the *History,* but Lancelot and his notorious adultery with Arthur's queen Guinevere (Geoffrey had her abducted by Mordred) are new additions. Other developments of the French texts include the incorporation of chivalry, courtly love, the Round Table, the quest for the Holy Grail, and the incest that resulted in Mordred's birth.

While the development of the Arthur material is not exactly like that of the Homeric epics, Lattimore's scheme is still applicable. We begin with an event whose details became obscure as the collapse of Roman authority and the Saxon invasions produced near-anarchy and the loss of knowledge

of the past. Based on the name of a hero, a set of legends grew that eventually tended to the supernatural. Seven centuries after the original "event," Geoffrey collected and reworked the legends, together with what were undoubtedly newly manufactured deeds and associations with historical and geographical entities, into a pseudo-historiographical work intended to create a coherent and heroic past for the British people. This work served to fix the setting, major characters, and basic plot of the legendary collection. Later expansions were based on the synthesis produced by Geoffrey's *History,* which had become the authoritative text. Not only are the characters and the events fictitious, but in a process that began with Geoffrey and was accelerated by the later versions, medieval feudalism, chivalry, and courtly love anachronistically replaced the semibarbarism of the story's fifth-century setting.

The following pattern in the growth of the Arthur material emerges if we apply Lattimore's outline:

1. The "event": British battles against the Saxons during the fifth century, when the Roman withdrawal from Britain created weakness and disorder. Only the name of Arthur survived in the legends of the period as that of a victorious military commander, but the earliest reference to Arthur in chronicles is not before the eighth century.
2. Legends, folktales, and poems which included the figure of Arthur in various adventures appeared, possibly as early as the sixth century. These are known from ninth/tenth-century collections of earlier materials.
3. A fixed legend was established by Geoffrey of Monmouth in his eclectic work on the kings of the Britons. The text brought together King Arthur and a host of characters who would remain prominent in later developments of the story. Geoffrey's book achieved popularity and authority as the basic account of the life and times of Arthur.

4–5. The French romances expanded and enhanced the story, adding a background of chivalry, courtly love, and Christian values. The process reached a peak with Malory, whose version became the one subsequent generations would read and study most.

As in the case of the Homeric epics a literary dark age separated the events from the literature about them. The major dislocations that characterized the dark age caused a loss of historical records and knowledge, so that the subsequent emergence of a legendary tradition was based on little more than the name of a hero.

CHAPTER 5

Development of the Tradition

Background

Thesis

The growth of the David tradition has steps similar to those of the Homeric and Arthurian traditions, but in a different order. According to the biblical account, the "event" occurred not before a dark age but at the end of or during the last stage of a period of invasions and migrations. Archaeological evidence for the thirteenth through eleventh centuries has been variously interpreted with regard to the identity of the population in the central highlands of what is now Israel (indigenous or immigrant? pastoralist or agricultural?[1]) and its relationship to the population of the lowland Canaanite cities. But the destruction layers in many sites, regardless of whether they were caused by rival warlords, Philistines, Israelites, or others, indicate that there was a great deal of unrest. The greatest cause of instability was the permanent withdrawal of the Egyptian imperial presence, and close behind that the Philistine settlement on the coast and subsequent expansion inland,[2] phenomena which are amply documented by archaeology and not generally a subject of scholarly dispute. In the biblical narrative David's unification of Israel and defeat of the Philistines brought order to the chaos among the Israelite tribes and independence to his state in central Canaan.

A connected story of David appears in the work of the Deuteronomist at least four centuries after the events described. Questions of the historicity of David and his kingdom aside for the moment, it is safe to say that this account has many components. The folktales, legends, and short poems

1. See I. Finkelstein, *The Archaeology of the Israelite Settlement* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1988).

2. Except for the Egyptian withdrawal and Philistine arrival, this period has been the subject of intensive debate among scholars for several decades, and all serious histories of Israel have included a critique of competing theories about the emergence of the people who would be called Israel (conquest, peaceful infiltration, peasant revolt, symbiosis). A recent and useful discussion is found in H. Shanks et al., *The Rise of Ancient Israel* (Washington, D.C.: BAR, 1992), which is a transcription of a symposium of several noted archaeologists.

about David and his times that are included would have reached a more advanced literary stage in a period when a more sophisticated civilization had emerged from the earlier confusion. The thesis presented here is that at some subsequent stage prior to the Deuteronomistic version of Samuel–Kings there emerged a popular fixed secular legend of David which became a more or less authoritative canon of stories to be included. It might have taken poetic form in something like the Scroll of Yashar, or perhaps it was a connected prose account that loosely organized the existing tales; or it might have consisted of both poetic and prose elements. The cycle of stories may have existed partially or even primarily in oral form. There certainly would not have been a fixed written text; my use of the term "fixed legend" should not be taken to imply that there was. The religio-historical composition of the Deuteronomist, begun perhaps in the late seventh century and completed during the exile, used and manipulated the components of this fixed legend. It, in turn, became the new authoritative version during the Persian period (though still open to revision), replacing the old secular cycle of tales and claiming to represent history. Details of the old stories that were not used by Dtr were forgotten and must be pieced together by inference from the present text of 1 and 2 Samuel.

Rost, many of the source critics, and some archaeologists have argued that Late Bronze Age Canaan was a land of cities capable of hosting a literary culture, and that David and Solomon had been able to restore these conditions for their kingdom. Jerusalem under the united monarchy could support polished literary activity and in fact did produce such texts about David's reign as the Succession History. Others, however, have suggested that the archaeological picture is different. In the Late Bronze–Iron I transition, they argue, the Canaanite cities were already in decline, and a period of demographic dislocation led to a culture of small towns and villages through the tenth century. Seen this way, the portrait of Jerusalem as the urban cultural center of a literary renaissance under Solomon — just a generation after it was basically a fort — would appear to be an anachronistic and idealized retrojection. The literature from this period would more likely have been legends and folktales than historiography. The more formal literature would have been much slower and later in development.

While a major period of dislocation and discontinuity preceded rather than followed the events in question, a second such period did occur prior to the creation of the current biblical text — the Babylonian invasions and deportations — with an attendant possible loss of knowledge. How much of the David story in Samuel–Kings was then based on the earlier tales or a preexilic fixed legend? The answer depends on how great the discontinuity was, and that is precisely the crux of the debate between the minimalists and their

opponents. The physical dislocation of destruction and exile was devastating, at least for the Judaean community in Babylon, but the interval between the deportations and the return under Cyrus was perhaps not long enough to erase memories and knowledge of the past. Written records may have survived in archival collections in Judah or Persia. If Cross's theory about two recensions of Dtr is correct, a preliminary version of the Deuteronomic history from the time of Josiah, prior to the catastrophe, preserved a specific version and interpretation of the earlier traditions. Davies and Thompson posit a much greater discontinuity, but to do so they must present a hypothesis that most of the people who returned from Persia to Judah were not the ethnic descendants of Judah's previous occupants, but a mixed group who artificially became Israel by inventing a past for itself.[3] But even Thompson agrees that the composer of Samuel–Kings drew on preexilic remnants of tradition, which for the David story were "legends of dynastic founders and rulers of a golden age."[4] Archives? Historiography? Poems? Legends? What then, was the genre of the material used by Dtr?

Genre: Story, Biography, or Apology?

One of the most sensitive studies of the David material is David Gunn's *The Story of King David: Genre and Interpretation* (1978).[5] This book deals with the Succession History, which Gunn preferred to call the story of "David as King," but its approach has implications also for the rest of the account of David, including the History of David's Rise. Gunn's method requires constant attention and caution on the part of the reader, because he attempts to examine not the final form of the material as it appears in Samuel–Kings, but "a reconstructed text, a postulated original" upon which the final form is based.[6] Yet his only entree to this hypothetical text is the actual text of Samuel–Kings. To cite it as witness to the "original" requires a further hypothesis that the Deuteronomist's version, aside from additions and editorial structure, kept the original material pretty much intact. In essence, what Gunn was talking about is that stage of the tradition, in terms of Lattimore's scheme discussed above in the previous chapter, which is beyond the mere collection of its components: a discrete literary work that serves to fix the legend and becomes the authoritative expression of the topic — prior to the

3. See above, chap. 2, 15–20.
4. Thompson, *Early History,* 109.
5. D. M. Gunn, *The Story of King David: Genre and Interpretation* (JSOT Supplement Series 6; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1978).
6. Ibid., 14.

elaboration and tendentious redaction of a later stage. The later stage, in this case, would be the present Samuel–Kings.

Gunn rejected the modern interpretations of the David as King narrative that once formed a near consensus after Rost. He found no evidence, for example, that it was composed during the Solomonic period (or, for that matter, that Solomonic Jerusalem was a cultural center in which great literature such as the J text of the Pentateuch was written). Its great detail does not indicate its chronological proximity to the action; otherwise, Gunn argued, one would have to posit early dates for the Iliad, the Song of Roland, and, in fact, any historical novel.[7] The so-called Succession History is not history and its focus is not on the succession; it is about David's public career and "about David the man, about David and his family, about David's own personal and private life."[8] It is neither political propaganda nor didactic moralizing. The narrative is "a fine piece of story-telling"[9] whose aim is art and "serious entertainment."[10] While it bears some similarity to a historical novel, that term would imply a written genre and authorial autonomy, while the David as King story is more of a traditional composition with marks of oral transmission. "[It] may not be so easily differentiated, generically speaking, from other prose stories, 'legends' or 'sagas,' in the Old Testament."[11]

To demonstrate the traditional and possibly oral nature of the story, Gunn provided a list of passages which show thematic repetitions or parallels within the biblical text, stock narrative units, and universal folk motifs.[12] Among these are stereotyped incidents and tension in David's relationship to the sons of Zeruiah; judgment-eliciting parables (Nathan's in 2 Sam 12 and the woman of Tekoa's in 14); women who bring death to men involved with them (Rizpah/Abner, Bathsheba/Uriah, Tamar/Amnon, Abishag/Adonijah); two messengers who race against each other (to announce Absalom's defeat, 2 Sam 18); the letter of death borne by the victim (Uriah); identical gifts of provisions (Abigail's in 1 Sam 25 and Ziba's in 2 Sam 16); battle scenes; and the reaction to messengers who bring news of death (Saul's in 1 Sam 31, Ishbaal's in 2 Sam 2, Absalom's in 2 Sam 18).

The cited passages from 1 Samuel in the previous paragraph are not part of the David as King story (which includes 2 Sam 2:8 or 2:12–5:3, plus 2 Sam 9–20 and 1 Kgs 1–2), but they, too, along with the episodes of the

7. Ibid., 30–31.
8. Ibid., 89.
9. Ibid., 37.
10. Ibid., 61.
11. Ibid., 38.
12. Ibid., 38ff.

book of Judges, are traditional stories which differ from the David as King material only in their degree of sophistication. "There are simplistic storytellers in oral traditions, and there are sophisticated ones, just as there are naive and complex traditions as such."[13] Thus the account of David's rise to power in 1 Samuel is also made up of traditional stories that probably reached a fixed form prior to their incorporation by the Deuteronomist. Gunn finds the composition of 1 Samuel impossible to untangle,[14] but that may be because the inclusion of variant versions of some tales leads to breaks in continuity.

The stories of David's rise from shepherd to ruler, variants and all, form a coherent account as compelling as that of David as King, and in many ways more exciting and memorable. Add to these shorter and longer narrative units the material that the Deuteronomist decided to include only in abbreviated form, such as the fuller tales behind the list of heroes in 2 Sam 21 and 23, and you have a veritable cycle of tales that make up the heroic legend of David and his warriors.

Because Gunn was interested in the David as King narrative as a literary work, he sought unifying themes. There is no single focus on who will succeed David, but heightened degrees of emphasis on the major crises in David's career: accession, rebellion, and succession.[15] If themes must be identified in both the political and private aspects of David's life, they are "giving and grasping," described as "gaining, displacement and bequeathal of status or authority."[16] The religious framework which evaluates David's actions is Deuteronomic; it does not belong to Gunn's "postulated original" text. While the story certainly provides moral issues and tensions, it does not judge. "We find in the narrative no simple *Tendenz* or moralizing but rather a picture of the rich variety of life that is often comic and ironic in its contrasting perspectives and conflicting norms."[17] While Gunn sees this absence of propaganda and moralizing as the mark of an artistic story, I would add that it is also the mark of a heroic story, in which the protagonist's reputation as a hero is not necessarily marred by actions which are clearly immoral. The Greek heroes had their hubristic acts, Lancelot was an adulterer, and David, in Shime'i's words, was a man of blood (2 Sam 16:8).

Is the Bible's life of David arranged as a biography or as a moral lesson, and how is this question relevant to the discussion of an artistic and/or heroic

13. Ibid., 59f.
14. Ibid., 75.
15. Ibid., 69.
16. Ibid., 94ff.; quotation from 110.
17. Ibid., 111.

story? Morton Smith (1951)[18] rejected Pfeiffer's contention that "the author's method is biographical. His story centers around the main characters, and national events are narrated in connection with personal history."[19] Smith pointed out that the story as it appears in Samuel–Kings is not a systematic account of David's life. It does not have much on David's greatest achievement, the final defeat of the Philistines. And of the last twenty or so years of David's rule, practically all that is covered is the revolt of Absalom, with its contingent events, and the attempted usurpation of Adonijah. Second Samuel 10–20 and 1 Kgs 1–2, understood as written by a single author, are not biography but "a moral tract" whose main theme is the revolt of Absalom as punishment for the adultery with Bathsheba and murder of Uriah. Secondary themes involving Joab, Shimeʿi, and Barzillai are also moralistic.[20]

Smith offered two alternatives: Either material in the allegedly biographical text of Samuel–Kings was drawn from an earlier moralizing account of David's life, or "the present moralizing account has been produced by late selection and (perhaps) adaptation of material from what was once a complete biography."[21] The second alternative may be the preferable one. "Now something like a biography of David — from whatever sources it may have been compounded — undoubtedly does run from 1 Sam 16, where David is introduced, to 2 Sam 5, where he is anointed king in Hebron." While the sequence may be "a bit muddled in places," the narrative does follow a chronological order of events in David's life.[22] Furthermore, details from the early career of David are connected to the Succession History. The accounts of David's friendship with Jonathan and Joab's assassination of Abner, for example, are necessary for understanding certain events in the Succession text. The latter is not, therefore, a free-standing account.[23] Even if written by a separate author, the Succession History is a continuation of the other stories about David upon which it depends.

Gunn's "postulated original" and Smith's second alternative — the present text as a moralizing account adapted from a selection of material from an earlier biography of David — are not so far apart. Of course what Smith called "biography" or "anything like a biography" in this context is not the product of critical exploration of archival texts, but a collection of tales of questionable historicity which someone had organized into an account of

18. M. Smith, "The So-Called 'Biography of David' in the Books of Samuel and Kings," *HTR* 44 (1951): 167–69.
19. Ibid., 168. He cites R. H. Pfeiffer's presidential address to SBL, New York, 1948.
20. Ibid.
21. Ibid., 169.
22. Ibid., 167.
23. Ibid., 169.

the life and times of its subject (cf. the arrangement of *logoi* by Herodotus). Such an organized collection is essentially a narrative that fixes the legend or cycle of stories that has been the focus of my analysis. It is Gunn's "postulated original" text. Gunn thought its purpose was entertainment and its genre storytelling; Smith saw it as a more serious attempt at biography. In both cases the tales, legends, and possibly bits of historical information that became part of the fixed text are the same. Whether "postulated original" or "biography," it is the morally neutral artistic or heroic story that preceded the subsequent version of Samuel–Kings, which through Dtr's adaptations became a moralizing account, dynastic propaganda, and part of an overriding Yahwistic interpretation of history.

P. Kyle McCarter Jr. also thought that the Deuteronomist reproduced pre-Dtr compositions, to which he added a limited number of editorial passages. For the history of the establishment of the monarchy he adopted a text written from the perspective of the prophets and stressing the importance of Samuel. But the earlier, or original, material on David was a source in itself. Its genre, however, was neither literature for entertainment nor biography, but royal apology. In his Anchor Bible commentary on Samuel (see above, chap. 2) and in an influential article of 1980 he developed an argument that this material, especially the History of David's Rise, went back to the reign of David himself, and that its purpose was self-serving propaganda.[24] In response to accusations of treachery and brutality like those of Shime'i (2 Sam 16) or the revolt of Sheba son of Bichri (2 Sam 20), a royal apology was issued to refute charges against the king:

- that he sought to advance at Saul's expense. On the contrary, he never wished ill to Saul.
- that he was a deserter. No, he was forced to flee by Saul.
- that he was an outlaw. No, he was a fugitive from unjust pursuit.
- that he was a Philistine mercenary. Yes, but only as a last resort, and he didn't fight against Israelites.
- that he was implicated in the death of Saul. No, he was not even present at the battle in which Saul fell.
- that he was a party to Abner's death. No, that resulted from a private feud with Joab.
- that he was involved in Ishbaal's assassination. No, that was a private act perpetrated by two of Ishbaal's own soldiers.[25]

24. P. Kyle McCarter Jr., "The Apology of David," *JBL* 99 (1980): 489–504.
25. Ibid., 499–502.

McCarter cited as another example of the genre of royal apology that of the Hittite usurper Hattushilish III in the thirteenth century, who claimed that the goddess Ishtar supported him, just as David claimed the support of YHWH.[26] The two new works on David by S. McKenzie and B. Halpern that have appeared in the twenty-first century have both adopted McCarter's analysis and built on it. A more detailed examination of this approach is presented in chapters 7 and 8.

Setting of the Story and Issues of Historicity

Wellhausen's work was the summation of nineteenth-century scholarship that denied historicity to the biblical account of the patriarchs by rejecting the existence of Bronze Age texts and dating the literary sources of Genesis to the tenth through fifth centuries. Then twentieth-century archaeology provided an ancient Near Eastern background for the patriarchal period, qualifying the conclusions of Wellhausen's Documentary Hypothesis: the *literary* sources of the pentateuchal texts are indeed no earlier than the tenth or ninth century, but these sources are based on previously existing oral traditions. While not historical records, these traditions might provide a fairly accurate picture of the Bronze Age sociocultural milieu in which the patriarchs lived. Source criticism, form criticism, and archaeology also framed the debate about the date and circumstances of the enslavement in Egypt, the exodus, and the rapid or gradual conquest and/or settlement of Canaan by Israel. The central issue for the period of Judges was the nature of the alleged tribal confederacy or amphictyony.

The new trend after mid-century was to reassess the relationship of the Israelites to the population of their land: Did Israel conquer Canaan or settle peacefully among the Canaanites and thus become heavily influenced by Canaanite literature and religion, or were the Israelites themselves, in fact, Canaanites who separated themselves for religious or sociopolitical reasons from their fellow countrymen? In either case the Canaanite connection would have major implications for understanding Israel's view of its past and the development of its religious ideas and institutions. Archaeologists called attention to the sudden growth of small settlements in the central hill country which featured cisterns and terrace agriculture. These were interpreted by one school as the homes of proto-Israelite newcomers who were not yet at the stage where they could take over the cities in the

26. Ibid., 496–98.

lowlands, and by another as the places to which Canaanites who became the Israelites went after their departure from the cities.[27]

Amid these conflicting theories there was general agreement on the historicity and importance of the united monarchy as the pivotal period which molded Israel into a self-conscious nation with an ethnic and political identity. After Saul's pioneering efforts based on the population of the central hills, David, militarily, and Solomon, economically, united the tribes, gained independence from Philistine domination, built the kingdom into a miniempire, and established a dynasty in Judah that would survive the secession of the northern tribes. David took Jerusalem as his capital, and Solomon made it a religious and commercial center whose wealth supported a literary culture. Solomon urbanized the country, rebuilding destroyed Canaanite cities such as Gezer, Megiddo, and Hazor. The archaeology of such sites indicated that after a period of low sophistication Solomon restored the higher standard of living that had been the norm in the Canaanite centers before they succumbed to the invasion or social revolt of the Israelites. In other words, what came to be seen by later generations as a golden age really was one.[28]

The challenge to this consensus began with an attack on the validity of comparative Near Eastern textual methodology in the study of the patriarchal age and continued with an updating of Wellhausenian source criticism. Where Wellhausen had popularized the classic formulation for the sources of the Pentateuch that placed J and E in the early monarchy, D in the late monarchy, and P as well as the hypothetical Redactor in the Persian period, Van Seters, Davies, and Thompson now argued that if the present Pentateuch and historical books from Joshua to 2 Kings were products of postexilic redactors, what, indeed, proves that they were collections of fully developed documents that go back as far as the tenth century? These books reflect concerns and ideas of postexilic Judaean life; no evidence shows that anything but bits and pieces of tradition are remnants of the preexilic age. And if that is the case, might not the united monarchy be an unhistorical

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27. There is extensive literature on the schools of Albright (fitting the biblical narrative into ancient Near Eastern history), Alt (peaceful infiltration by proto-Israelite pastoralists), Mendenhall and Gottwald (revolt of disaffected Canaanites), Fritz and Finkelstein (variations of long-term symbiosis between indigenous proto-Israelites in highlands and lowland Canaanite cities), and Dever (a mixture of the forgoing). T. L. Thompson, *Early History of the Israelite People,* has a lengthy critical summary, and a symposium of archaeologists on the subject appears in H. Shanks et al., *The Rise of Ancient Israel.*

28. B. Halpern continues to be the most sophisticated representative of this position. Using the vocabulary of Realpolitik and reducing the scale of the Bible's exaggerated geopolitical rhetoric, he nevertheless accepts the basic outline of the biblical account. See his *The Emergence of Israel in Canaan* and "The Construction of the Davidic State," both cited above.

retrojection from the Persian period, just as according to the Wellhausenians the patriarchs were the products of tenth-century imagination?[29]

Thompson, Davies, and others have interpreted the archaeological record as supporting their contention that anything as grand as the united monarchy described in Samuel–Kings was impossible at the beginning of the tenth century. There are no written records, and the physical remains do not point to any large-scale government or organized economy. (They have also argued against the existence of a substantial Judaean state based in Jerusalem before the seventh century, but that issue is beyond the bounds of this study.) These interpretations are, of course, hotly disputed, and it is too soon to tell whether the new approach will be refuted or lead to a new consensus. In any case it cannot be ignored. As Bultmann's extremely skeptical form-critical theories affected study of the Gospels in the mid-twentieth century, so the approach of the minimalists may affect Hebrew Bible studies. The minimalist package of methods, theories, and interpretations may not gain full or partial acceptance, but scholars will inevitably exercise greater caution and will be wary of facile assignment of historicity even to general descriptions found in Joshua through Samuel–Kings.

Proceeding with such caution, and maintaining the thesis that the David story is heroic literature and not historiography, I must still deal with issues of historicity in order to establish a basis for the origin of the heroic tales. In the list of *dramatis personae* in the story of David, theophoric names with the elements *el, 'am,* or *ab* are preponderant over *YHWH* combinations (see, for example, the lists of heroes in 2 Sam 21 and 23, or of David's children in 5:13–15), and three members of Saul's family have what were undoubtedly *Baal*-names: Saul's son Ishbaal (or Eshbaal) and a son and grandson both named Mephibaal (or Meribaal; cf. 1 Chr 8:34 and 9:40).[30] While there is no guarantee that the names were those of real people, the tradition from which the names come reflects a time when Yahwism was less dominant or exclusive.

Certain individuals are consistently associated with particular places: main characters like Saul with Gibeah, David with Hebron and later Jerusalem, Samuel with Ramah; and minor figures such as Shobi son of Nahash with Rabbat-Ammon (2 Sam 17:27), Machir son of Amiel with Lo-debar (ibid. and 2 Sam 9:1ff.), Barzillai with Rogelim of Gilead (2 Sam 17:27 and 19:32ff.), and Shime'i son of Gera with Bachurim (2 Sam 19:17). The stories may have preserved the names of important leaders from certain towns

29. See above, chap. 2, on minimalism.

30. The theophoric names have been discussed by many, most recently B. Halpern, *David's Secret Demons,* 70f.

or regions. The rosters of David's administrative aides (2 Sam 8:16–18 and 20:23–26) include individuals who play no role outside these lists and may represent early records or memories. Of course, nothing precludes that these characters may also have been invented by the makers or collectors of legends. In the Arthurian tradition, for example, the names of Arthur and some of his companions existed in early folk poetry (though this is extant only in late manuscripts), others appeared for the first time in Geoffrey of Monmouth, while even others were the invention of the post-Geoffrey French writers. The bards who composed the Homeric poems may have included characters known from oral traditions, or they made up the catalogues of Greek and Trojan heroes and associated them with familiar locales. Since the pre-Dtr sources of the David story are not extant, we can only guess if any might have had historical value. Is the roster of David's officials, for example, a remnant of an early archive or a fictional list of supporting characters? Are we to believe that the Bible's many genealogical tables, including those which go all the way back to the beginnings of Israel's tribes, are all based on solid historical records and that none of the names were made up? Specificity with regard to names and family trees does not prove historicity.

The political setting described by the biblical account of David is a country in disarray. The tribal system had failed to achieve meaningful unity and had witnessed at least one unsuccessful attempt at hegemony (Abimelech, Judg 9) and a civil war (Benjamin against the rest, Judg 19–20). Small wars were being fought among the tribes and against such as the Canaanites, Moabites, and Arameans for control of territory. The Philistine expansion from the coast was the most serious threat. The biblical description is in broad terms consistent with the late twentieth-century archaeological picture of the period from about 1200 to 1000 B.C.E.: small towns or villages in the central highlands, a power vacuum left by the withdrawal of Egyptian control, destruction levels in cities (though it is unclear who destroyed what), and evidence of Philistine occupation or influence in several inland areas. When read carefully, the account of Saul and David presents little that is anachronistic with regard to this milieu. The rivalries and alliances among the Israelites and Philistines feature Hebrews acting as mercenaries for both sides (1 Sam 14:21), warlords from small towns (e.g., Barzillai, the "great man" of Rogelim who sent his son to serve with David — 2 Sam 19:32ff — or Machir of Lo-debar, who had ties with both Saul's family and David, 2 Sam 9:1ff. and 17:27), outlaws running protection rackets (David, in 1 Sam 25), family leadership of semiorganized armies or gangs (Saul's army and David's band), and ousted chieftains serving as mercenaries (David as the most prominent example).

This is a situation not unlike that recorded in the Amarna Letters of the fourteenth century, another time when Egypt neglected Canaan. The warlords and their allies, some still loyal to Egypt, strove for advantage, raiding some towns and destroying others. Rib-Addi of Byblos was driven out by his brother and the sons of 'Abdu-Ashirta. Zatatna of Acco harbored an important deserter. The particularly active Labayu of Shechem and his sons attacked Megiddo and other towns. Milkilu of Gezer was beset by a certain Yanhamu, who demanded Milkilu's wife and children. Shuwardata of Hebron and 'Abdu-Heba of Jerusalem (Shuwardata disparaged him as "another Labayu") fought over control of Keilah and Bethlehem. The threat of the 'Apiru was everywhere.[31] Some of the same towns were later involved in the hostilities of the free-for-all that followed the Egyptian pullback in the twelfth century. 'Abdu-Heba, the Amarna Age ruler of Jerusalem, saw Hebron, Bethlehem, and Keilah as his sphere of influence. He pleaded with his benefactor, the king of Egypt, who, he says several times, had established him in Jerusalem, that his military actions should not be interpreted as rebellion against him. David's position in Jerusalem and his prior relations with the Philistines are similarly described in 1 Samuel.

Neither is the physical setting of the biblical story of David, if not Solomon, distorted by many anachronisms. The towns are small. Saul operates in the central hill country, using his native Gibeah as a base. David's Jerusalem is essentially a fortress to which he added adjacent residential areas (2 Sam 5:9). The building of his palace with the help of Hiram of Tyre (5:11) appears to be a late and awkward intrusion in the text. It is probably there to assert YHWH's choice of David (5:12) and to set up the later insertion of 2 Sam 7, which draws a contrast between the king's palace and the humble tent in which the ark of YHWH dwelt (7:2), all in turn to introduce the theme of YHWH's dynastic promise expressed through Nathan's oracle. These passages aside, the story of David makes no attempt to turn Jerusalem into Camelot. That is left to Solomon. But the glittering city which attracted such as the Queen of Sheba and spawned a literary culture may be more anachronistic than historical. The seizure of a local citadel, its expansion into a base for dominating neighbors, and the beginnings of royal trappings are not unusual occurrences, but to leap from a culture of small rural villages to full urbanized sophistication within one generation is difficult to accept. That tales, legends, and factual information about David and Solomon abounded in this period is probable; but lengthy polished literary

31. See J. Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1955), 483ff., for the texts of several of the Amarna Letters. For the incidents cited, see texts EA Nos. 137 (Rib-Addi), 234 (Zatatna), 270 (Milkilu), 280, 286–90 ('Abdu-Heba), and for Labayu and the Apiru, passim.

works such as the so-called Succession History or the J text written during Solomon's reign stretch the imagination. One might argue that the tradition of Solomon's association with the construction of the magnificent Temple of YHWH is so strong that it is difficult to deny it some sort of historicity (a similar case is sometimes made concerning the tradition of slavery in Egypt and the exodus). But it must be noted that in the Hebrew Bible outside of Kings and Chronicles the connection of the temple and Solomon is never explicitly made. None of the prophets who refer to the temple ever invoke Solomon's name in association with it. Proverbs (1:1; 10:1; 25:1) and Song of Songs (1:5; 3:9; 3:7; 3:11; 8:12) allude to Solomon's legendary wisdom and opulence, but not to the temple.

The religious setting of 1–2 Samuel, when one eliminates the obviously Deuteronomic comments, is as interesting as it is unclear. The theophoric names in the story appear to suggest the coexistence of El, Baal, and YHWH worship in no particular pattern. Michal has *teraphim,* or images of household gods (1 Sam 19:13). Considering the rhetoric against deviant worship throughout the Deuteronomic historical books, the absence of such polemic in the entire story of David is remarkable. The evils of the goddess Asherah or her tree-grove shrines (*Asherim*) are never mentioned. Baal and Ashtoret appear only in the short sermon of Samuel (1 Sam 7:3–4) and in his long speech describing YHWH's reward and punishment of Israel in the past (12:10), both elements of the text's Deuteronomic framework.

Samuel is YHWH's seer — a Deuteronomic association — though he has a theophoric El name, and the name of his father is Elkanah. There are Baal names in Saul's family, and David gives his sons El names (Elishu'a, Elishama', Elyada', Elifelet — 2 Sam 5:15–16); only Adonijah has a YHWH name. Among the other YHWH names are those of Saul's son Jonathan, Uriah the Hittite (!), and Benaiah, chief of the foreign mercenaries. David fights in YHWH's name against Goliath and brings the ark of YHWH to Jerusalem; the former episode may involve Deuteronomic editing, and the latter, the "Ark Narrative," is often viewed as a discrete later tradition. Sacrifice on *bamot,* or high places, draws no negative comments. Samuel the seer has supernatural knowledge (1 Sam 9), manipulates spirits for good and evil purposes (1 Sam 19), and returns as a ghost to reveal the future (1 Sam 28). Prophets appear as bands of ecstatics (1 Sam 10). David's sons, presumably of Judaean rather than Levitic birth, are priests in 2 Sam 8:18.

All this depicts a period before a cult of YHWH with exclusivist characteristics was institutionalized. Except in Deuteronomic passages such as Samuel's farewell speech, there is no significant polemic against the worship of other gods. In fact, while there may be rivalry or competitions of

strength among the gods — for example, the captive ark destroying Philistine idols (1 Sam 5) or David's soldiers triumphantly displaying captured Philistine images after the battle of Baal-Perazim (2 Sam 5) — there is a surprising absence of monolatristic or monotheistic propaganda throughout the David narrative. YHWH worship may have originated locally or elsewhere;[32] in any case either YHWH's attributes were syncretized with those of the chief Canaanite deities, El and/or Baal, or his cult existed side by side with theirs, or both. In his study of Israelite religion, aptly titled *The Early History of God,* Mark Smith, citing Israel's Canaanite background, employs terms such as "ditheism and polytheistic Yahwism."[33] Baruch Halpern has argued strongly that a militant YHWH-alone policy was the innovation of Josiah's reform in the seventh century, with the Deuteronomic history that supported it admitting Israel's own religiously pluralistic past and demonizing it.[34]

Neither is there much indication that the traditions about Israel's prehistory had been fully worked out in material other than what is arguably late. Moses and Aaron appear only in Samuel's Deuteronomic farewell speech (1 Sam 12:6, 8). Abraham is absent, and Jacob is mentioned only in 1 Sam 12:8 and 2 Sam 23:1, the introduction to David's "last words," a late, probably post-Dtr text. The exodus from Egypt is referred to in the Deuteronomic speech of the man of God to Eli (1 Sam 2:27), in the negative material about the demand for a king (1 Sam 8:8 and 10:18), in Samuel's farewell speech (1 Sam 12:6, 8), in the Amalekite episode (1 Sam 15:2, 6), and in connection with Nathan and the Davidic covenant (2 Sam 7:6, 23). The only other references to the exodus are in the Ark Narrative (1 Sam 4:8 and 6:6), whose date and relationship to the rest of the David story are subjects for debate.

What, then, might be the plausible history or, stated more cautiously, the earliest report of events behind the biblical story of David? I would suggest that tenth-century tales described the ascendancy of a warlord from Hebron, later based in the fortress of Jerusalem, to hegemony over central Israel. David, as this hero was known, had relations with the Philistines and with another warlord, Saul of Gibeah, perhaps initially as his vassal, becoming eventually his rival and successor. David was remembered as a victor in

32. P. K. McCarter, "The Origins of Israelite Religion," in H. Shanks et al., *The Rise of Ancient Israel,* 119ff., suggests southern Jordan.

33. M. Smith, *The Early History of God* (San Francisco: Harper, 1987), 146.

34. B. Halpern, "The Baal (and the Asherah?) in Seventh-Century Judah," published on the Ioudaios internet site: *ftp://ftp.lehigh.edu/pub/listserv/ioudaios-i/Articles/bhbaals* (read on January 22, 2001).

battles with the Philistines, whose threat of domination he effectively ended. The reason that such tales continued to multiply was that David came to be regarded as the founder of the Judaean royal dynasty, whose historical existence the Tel Dan inscription appears to confirm.

This simple picture might be fleshed out a little by N. P. Lemche's description of the "patronage society" that marked the Amarna Age and the time of David.[35] Between these periods the village culture of the central highlands was an interval between more extensive patronage systems, that is, the relationship between Pharaoh and the "kings" of small-scale Canaanite townships, and the chiefdoms run by patronage families such as those of Saul and David. N. Na'aman, who also makes extensive comparisons between the Amarna Age and the age of David, describes tenth-century Jerusalem as a highland stronghold and center of power that dominated a large territory in the hills and was able to expand to the lowlands and possibly neighboring kingdoms.[36] That center of power, however, was the capital not of a state, but of a "prestate polymorphous chiefdom."[37] Nevertheless, Jerusalem, like its Amarna Age antecedents, could have had a palace, court, servants, attendants, a temple, and scribes. These two views, though they deal with different social models (that may be complementary), are not far apart, except with regard to David. Na'aman, citing the Tel Dan inscription and passages in 2 Samuel which he argues came from early written records, believes that David was a historical figure and founder of a dynasty.[38] Lemche, however, sees the Judaean royal dynasty evolving from a patronage system administered by a figure known as David, who attracted all sorts of traditions to himself; but this David was its eponymous ancestor, not necessarily a historical person.[39]

Once more a comparison with the Arthurian tradition is instructive for the way legends begin. The historical setting of the "original" Arthur's life and times is remarkably similar to that of David. The Romans had withdrawn (cf. the Egyptians' withdrawal from the Canaanite lowlands), leaving the Britons in a somewhat anarchical situation in which small-town chieftains fought each other. But the greatest problem was the immigration and spread of the Saxons (cf. the Philistines). The religious climate was diverse: a mixture of Christianity introduced by the Romans, Mithraism, also brought

35. N. P. Lemche, "From Patronage Society to Patronage Society," in *The Origins of the Ancient Israelite States,* ed. V. Fritz and P. Davies (JSOT Supplement 228; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 108–20.

36. N. Na'aman, "The Contribution of the Amarna Letters."

37. Ibid., 17, 24.

38. Ibid., 21–24.

39. Lemche, "From Patronage Society," 19–20.

by the Roman armies, and the old religion(s) of the Celts. These forms of worship were probably in a state of tension-filled coexistence. The earliest written reference to Arthur made him a warrior chief who on two occasions defeated the Saxons while wearing a Christian icon on his armor. Many legends were later grafted onto this image of a Saxon-fighting hero. Similarly in Israel a heroic tradition developed from the image of the "historical" Philistine-fighter David.

To return to the question of historicity, what texts does Na'aman regard as the earliest historical evidence? He avoids connected narratives and proposes a series of brief lists.[40]

2 Sam 3:2–5; 5:14–16	David's wives and sons (perhaps "extracted from an original list"[41])
2 Sam 23:8–39	David's officers, the Three, and the Thirty ("certainly drawn from a very old document"[42])
2 Sam 8:16–18; 20:23–26	David's royal officials (from an old document or taken from a list of Solomon's bureaucrats[43])

Also early and relevant for historical reconstruction are lists from Solomon's reign: 1 Kgs 4:2–6 (Solomon's officials), 1 Kgs 4:9–19 (twelve tax districts and their administrators), 1 Kgs 9:15, 17–18 (reports of building projects — temple, palace, Millo, wall of Jerusalem, Hazor, Megiddo, Gezer, Bet Horon, Tadmor).[44] All this presupposes scribal activity in the early monarchy. Such activity is demonstrated by the account of Shishak's campaign in 1 Kgs 14:25–28, whose agreement with details of the Sheshonq inscription in Egypt implies that the writer of the text in Kings had before him a written account contemporary with the event.[45] (See also above on the plausibility of early scribal activity inferred from parallels with the Amarna Age.) Additional evidence is the use of hieratic signs and numbers on eighth-century Israelite and Judaean ostraca and weights. By that time use of these signs had waned in Egypt; they must have entered Hebrew script before

40. Discussed in "Sources and Composition in the History of David," in *The Origins of the Ancient Israelite States* (ed. V. Fritz and P. Davies; JSOT Supplement 228; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 171, 177f.; "The Contribution of the Amarna Letters," 22f.; "Cowtown or Royal Capital?" 45–47.

41. "Sources and Composition," 171.

42. Ibid.

43. Ibid.

44. Ibid.

45. Ibid., 170–71.

the ninth century, introduced by Egyptian or Egyptian-trained Canaanite scribes.[46]

Na'aman introduces a further hypothesis: the existence of an eighth-century chronicle about the early monarchy which was employed and quoted by Dtr. The argument centers on the accounts of David's wars against the Philistines in 2 Sam 5 and the Arameans, Moabites, and others in 2 Sam 8:[47]

1. The triple formula that identifies the Aramean leader Hadadezer son of Rehob (meaning from the region of Rehob), King of Zobah (2 Sam 8:3, 12) is known only from the ninth century. Gaps in the description of his encounter with David appear to be filled in with material known about the late ninth-century king of Damascus, Hazael, another native of Bet Rehob, that would be known by Dtr only from an earlier text. This ninth-century material would have appeared in a chronicle no later than the early eighth century, when the knowledge was still fresh.
2. Gath figures prominently in the Philistine wars. This city was taken by Hazael late in the ninth century (2 Kgs 12:17) and by the mid-eighth century was no longer an independent state. Yet Amos 6:2 refers to Gath as one of three strong kingdoms of the past. Amos must have known of Gath's earlier glory from a chronicle that preceded his own time.
3. Isaiah 28:21 refers to YHWH's victories at Mount Perazim and the Valley of Gibeon, referring apparently to David's defeat of the Philistines at Baal-Perazim (2 Sam 5:20) and in the Valley (of Gibeon, as implied by 1 Chr 14:13, 16 [Geba in 2 Sam 5:25; but in 5:22 this second battle is placed in the Valley of Rephaim]), which Isaiah must have known from an existing chronicle. The narrative of the Philistine wars is then taken up in 2 Sam 8:1 with David's conquest of Meteg Ha-ammah, the logical continuation of 2 Sam 5. The entire account by Dtr in 2 Sam 5:17–25 and 8:1 was based on the eighth-century chronicle; 8:1 may even be a direct quotation.
4. An "old core" of material is also behind the account of the Ammonite war in 2 Sam 10–12 and the relations with Zobah, Damascus, and Hamath in 8:3–11. Dtr would not have known about common tenth-century interests of Israel and Hamath against the other Arameans without reference to an earlier chronicle.

46. Ibid., 172.
47. Ibid., 173–79.

5. The war against Moab (8:2), with its ruthless decimation of the defeated army, reflects a reaction to Moabite treatment of Israelites at the time of Mesha in the ninth century. The battle with Edom in the Valley of Salt (8:13–14) borrows from the victory of Amaziah over Edom (2 Kgs 14:7) in the early eighth century.

Lists and other texts — including the hypothetical chronicle — were kept in the palace or temple library in Jerusalem to be used for the training of scribes. "Likewise stories, such as the pre-Deuteronomistic narratives of King Saul and David's rise to power, might have been included in this corpus."[48] What else may have been in the pre-Dtr chronicle? The brief description of Saul's victories (1 Sam 14:47–48); the coronation of Ishbaal (2 Sam 2:8); David's reign in Hebron (2 Sam 2:1–3); the civil war against Ishbaal; the conquest of Jebus (2 Sam 5:6–9); the wars against the Philistines and others noted above. Sometimes Dtr quoted verbatim and sometimes he reworked the material.[49]

Na'aman's eighth-century chronicle, which contains mostly information about wars and which provided an organized sequence of events for later historians such as Dtr, is a kind of fixed text that preceded the extant one, similar in function to the pre-Dtr fixed text I have proposed. While mine (and Gunn's) is a collection of legends and tales, Na'aman prefers to see his as a record of events. But even as he maintains the plausibility of a large Davidic kingdom based in Jerusalem, he admits, "There is nothing impossible about the account of David's conquests — the only problem is whether or not it really happened. Unfortunately, the sources for this episode are of such nature that we are unable to answer the question with a definite 'yes' or 'no.' "[50]

B. Halpern has consistently taken the position that the basic outline of the biblical narrative is historical, but his "principle of minimal interpretation" leads him to a reduction of the details which the text tends to exaggerate.[51] A report of the conquest of a large territory should be understood as the conquest of only a part of it. Biblical rhetoric expands borders and credits enemies with greater unity and strength than they deserve. Exaggeration and programmatic presentation is not only Deuteronomic, but also is a feature of the underlying texts from the time of David himself. He joins those scholars who take 2 Samuel as a representation of tenth-century

48. Ibid., 181.
49. Ibid., 184.
50. Ibid., 183.
51. Halpern, "The Construction of the Davidic State," 53.

literature,[52] arguing against Na'aman's interpretation of the material about Hadadezer[53] and against a later but pre-Dtr chronicle.

Most interesting is Halpern's contention that the language of 2 Sam 8, on David's victories against a variety of foes, is reminiscent of the conventions of Near Eastern "display inscriptions"[54] set up by kings to summarize their deeds in glowing — that is, exaggerated — terms. Such inscriptions are not necessarily chronological. Viewed as the functional equivalent of a display inscription, 2 Sam 8 is "a summary of David's positive achievements," "the capstone of the narrative of David's royal career,"[55] listing his victories over the Philistines, Moab, Aram, and Edom, successful diplomacy, and the winning of territory and tribute for Israel. In the larger scheme of 2 Samuel it sets the stage for the Succession History that follows. Two passages in the text may refer to David's actual display inscriptions, or stelae.[56] His encounter with Hadadezer was on his way to erect a stela (Hebrew *yad*) at the river, probably the Jordan (8:3). When he returned from his defeat of Edom (so LXX; MT reads Aram), David made himself a "name" (Hebrew *shem*), probably a monument (8:13).[57] If 2 Sam 8 was itself based on such inscriptions, we are dealing with written evidence from the time of David himself.

Unlike Na'aman, Halpern insists that a central state did exist under David, and that it controlled substantial areas in Jordan and some in the north as well. Jerusalem was indeed mainly a fortress, but like Megiddo and Hazor, which also lacked domestic architecture, it served as residence of the king and administrative center, divorced from the population: a "disembedded capital."[58] The alleged lack of extensive population and scarcity of luxury goods charted by Jamieson-Drake and cited by the minimalists is not at odds with the historical situation of Jerusalem as depicted, with perhaps a little exaggeration, by the biblical text. Halpern has no reservations about the basic historicity of the story of David, including many specific details, as long as these are reconstructed through the principle of minimal interpretation.

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52. Ibid., 53f. Among others he cites J. Vanderkam, "Davidic Complicity in the Deaths of Abner and Eshbaal: A Historical and Redactional Study," *JBL* 99 (1980): 521–39, who takes the text seriously as history but recognizes redactional movement of material; and P. K. McCarter, "The Apology of David," *JBL* 99 (1980): 489–504, who regards the genre of HDR as royal apology but traces it to David himself.
53. Ibid., 59–67.
54. Ibid., 46–53, 70–71.
55. Ibid., 54.
56. Ibid., 70.
57. So also McCarter, *II Samuel,* ad loc.
58. Halpern, "The Construction of the Davidic State," 73–74.

Na'aman and Halpern argue the possibility and plausibility of a tenth-century Davidic kingdom similar to its manifestation in 1–2 Samuel. Na'aman avoids being categorical about its reality. To accept Halpern's position one must agree that a great amount of textual material in the story of David is both contemporary with David or Solomon and of historical value. Aside from imposing an editorial framework, Dtr's contribution is minor; Dtr has reproduced material either from David's time (Halpern) or from an eighth-century chronicle (Na'aman) with few additions and alterations. Neither case is proved conclusively. The next chapter continues to explore the alternative thesis: that the story of David is less history and more a developing cycle of legends.

Chapter 6

Formation of the Legend

The authors and editors of Samuel–Kings made no attempt to cite royal annals for the lives of Saul and David as they did for later kings of Judah and Israel. The detailed adventures and extensive dialogue, along with the sheer length of the reported episodes, set off the narrative of the early monarchy from the accounts of later rulers in 1 and 2 Kings. The relative absence of religious polemic so characteristic of the Deuteronomic history also demonstrates that the redactors handled the David story differently from Judges and 1–2 Kings. The Saul and David (and Solomon, to a great extent) material constitutes a foundation story, tales of the origin of the Israelite state which preceded the more systematic history of the later kings. It is impossible to determine with any accuracy the dates when the various elements of these tales arose or were combined to form longer narratives, but some of these elements may be identified.

The Tales behind Short Notices and Longer Military Accounts

Probably among the earliest sources are the tales about David's warriors for which the short notices in 2 Sam 21 and 23 are but references and abridgements. Jonathan son of Shim'ai killed a Philistine with six fingers and six toes; Eleazar son of Dodo (or David's uncle) fought so hard that his hand stuck to his sword; Yoshev Bashevet (Yeshav'am) the Tahkemonite singlehandedly killed 800 in one battle, and Abishai 300, and so forth. (Note that the earliest record of Arthur in the chronicles was that he killed 960 Saxons in a battle.) By the time these references were incorporated into the present text of 1–2 Samuel, either such brief notices are all the compiler had or, more likely, he abbreviated longer popular stories that were well known.

Short notices of great deeds are inappropriate for secular heroic literature, which would seem to demand fuller accounts to entertain readers or listeners. Those detailed stories must have appeared in a preexilic collection interwoven with David's other adventures. It would make sense for the

Deuteronomist, who had other moral, national, and theological concerns which included emphasis on David as YHWH's man and founder of the dynasty, to abbreviate the warrior tales and add them at the end as a kind of appendix. The Deuteronomist knew the fuller tales, and presumably so did his audience. Otherwise why include the short notices at all? The case is similar to the brief account of the sons of God, the daughters of men, and the Nephilim in Gen 6:1–4. The compiler of Genesis merely placed a brief reference to the popular story (taken from the J stratum) into a chronological context before the flood. Whether the story had been abbreviated by J or by himself, the final redactor must have assumed that his readers were familiar with the details. Any other explanation would imply that the author or editor was intentionally confusing his readership. A tantalizing reference to Benaiah's killing of a lion in a pit on a snowy day (2 Sam 23:20) could be made only in the assurance that the circumstances of this event were generally known. The stories behind the brief notices, then, were part of the David tradition prior to the exile, and were still known to the contemporaries of the Deuteronomist working either in the reign of Josiah or the Babylonian exile.

To see these short notices not as abbreviations but as complete texts taken from an early archive and not abbreviated by Dtr makes little sense. These are summaries of stories with legendary exaggerations, not merely lists of royal employees. What would be their place in an archival list? Alternatively, a later pre-Dtr collection of stories or a chronicle (as Na'aman's hypothetical eighth-century text) may have already abbreviated this material, but again, to what purpose? On the other hand, the tales behind these notices are peripheral to Dtr's editorial aims, and accordingly, their abbreviation and removal from the chronological narrative to an appendix is understandable. They might even detract from David's glory.

An example of a more developed martial tale might be Jonathan's raid on the Philistine camp at Michmash (1 Sam 14); contrast its length and dramatic tension with the brief abbreviated account of the raid through Philistine lines by David's men to get him water from the well at Bethlehem (2 Sam 23). Note also that Jonathan and his armor bearer kill only twenty Philistines, not hundreds, and that Saul's entire army has a mere six hundred men (23:2, 14), equal to David's outlaw/mercenary force later in the narrative (1 Sam 27 and 30). While it is a tale of adventure, there are no supernatural acts or incredible feats in the account of Jonathan's raid; the story probably took its current literary form in a period later than did the tales of 2 Sam 21 and 23. A parallel in Judges is the contrast between the brief reference to Shamgar son of 'Anat, who killed six hundred Philistines with an oxgoad (Judg 3:31) and the longer adventures of Ehud, Deborah

and Yael, Gideon, and especially Samson, whose fantastic slaughter of a thousand Philistines with the jawbone of an ass (Judg 15) is worked into a much more complex tale. The confrontation between Abner and Asahel in 2 Sam 2 is more detailed than the duels in 2 Sam 21 and 23, but much shorter than the episode of David and Goliath in 1 Sam 17.

The discussion in chapter 5 on whether or not the David story belongs to the genre of biography took note of Morton Smith's question about missing information: If David's most significant accomplishment was winning independence from the Philistines, where, other than just ten verses (2 Sam 5:17–25 and 8:1), are the accounts of his wars against them? The answer is that the warrior tales in 2 Sam 21 and 23 are in fact the legendary remnants of those wars, probably the earliest tales, characterized by fantastic details. The two battles in 2 Sam 5 are in fact primarily oracular accounts. In the first (5:19–21), YHWH's word initiates the action at Baal-Perazim; in the second (5:22–25), David requests an oracle before engaging the Philistines in the Valley of Refaim. Furthermore, the encounter at Baal-Perazim is also an etiological story (5:20). The battles in 2 Sam 5 lack the creative imagination of the abbreviated hero tales, but their historicity is equally questionable. It may be that almost all of David's struggles against the Philistines — at least those that survived in the biblical accounts — are more legend than history.

A series of military *logoi* in what may or may not be chronological order has been placed into the main narrative by Dtr, or earlier by the compiler of the "fixed legend." These begin with the above-mentioned battle with the Philistines at Baal-Perazim in 2 Sam 5:17–25 and continue in 2 Sam 8 with wars against the Philistines, Moab, Zobah and other Arameans, and Edom. The basic reports include details: the slaughter of two-thirds of the Moabite males (8:2), the Aramean chariots (8:4), a suit for peace by the king of Hamath (8:9–10), dedications of tribute and spoil to YHWH (8:7–8, 11–12), and the placing of prefects in Aram and Edom (8:6, 14). The sources behind these military accounts may be very old; Halpern traces them to display inscriptions, which typically included these kinds of details. The reports are qualitatively different from the tales behind the heroic short notices of 2 Sam 21 and 23, which contain elements of exaggeration and oddity and focus on the great deeds of individuals. Most of the brief notices in 21 and 23 also feature the Philistines as the primary enemy and would appear to represent the earliest folk traditions of David's wars of independence, while the reports in 2 Sam 8 deal with David's attempts at territorial expansion after he was well established as king. Of all the military accounts, those in 2 Sam 8 have the best chance of reflecting real history.

The account of the war against Ammon and its Aramean allies in 2 Sam 10 appears to be an expansion of 2 Sam 8 that explains how the Arameans

came to confront David. It includes the humiliation of David's envoys by the Ammonites and subsequent Israelite victories over them and their Aramean allies by Abishai and Joab (2 Sam 10). (Details of the last stages of the conquest of Ammon are then used in 2 Sam 11 and 12 as the backdrop to the story of David, Bathsheba, and Uriah.) Compared with reports in 2 Sam 8, this is a highly expanded narrative which includes personal relations among rulers, insults and revenge, battlefield tactics, and the involvement of named generals and their forces. Joab leads "the entire force of warriors" (10:7; *gibborim* — are these the elite heroes, also *gibborim,* of 2 Sam 23:8–9?) against the Aramean forces while his brother Abishai commands the rest of the army against the Ammonites. Subsequently David himself crosses the Jordan and directs the defeat of the Arameans under Hadadezer and his general Shobak.

The Aramean wars of 8:3–8 and 10 are probably identical, but different sources have produced different details. In chapter 8 David encountered Hadadezer son of Rehob, king of Zobah as he (David? Hadadezer?) was leaving a stela at the river (most likely the Jordan rather than the Euphrates). David's army killed seven hundred horsemen and twenty thousand foot soldiers, and kept one hundred chariots. When the forces of Damascus arrived to help those of Zobah, David killed another twenty-two thousand of the enemy. In 10:1–7 we are given the reason for the presence of the Arameans: they were paid by the Ammonites, who feared reprisals for their diplomatic insult of David's envoys. The Aramean forces came from Beth Rehob, Zobah (twenty thousand foot soldiers — the number killed by David in chap. 8), Maakah (one thousand men), and Tob (twelve thousand men). After their defeat by Joab and Abishai a second Aramean incursion (10:15–19) took place under Hadadezer and his general Shobak, who commanded "the Arameans from across the Euphrates." David crossed the Jordan and defeated the Arameans at Helam, killing seven hundred of the enemy chariot force and forty thousand horsemen (compare the combined casualty total of the account in chap. 8), and Shobak as well. While chapters 8 and 10 may be referring to the same event, the expanded version in 2 Sam 10 is no epigraphical summary and does not even seem to be based on chapter 8. It is an independent narrative that works in major personalities and motives, more of a heroic telling of the tale.

Enhanced Stories and Tales

Once the names of heroes and limited knowledge of their deeds became popular, new stories would arise, enhanced by imaginative details often recognizable from stock folk-literature themes. Fantastic or semifantastic tales

appeared (cf. the parallel stage in the Arthurian tradition), of which the developed story of David's confrontation with Goliath is a good example. (See chap. 3.) The inexperienced and unknown hero slays the giant, ultimately wins the princess, and ends up in possession of a unique sword. The present text of 1 Sam 17 may involve the conflation of an original story about David with details from Elhanan's defeat of Goliath (2 Sam 21:19).

Political considerations may have led to some expansions. One example of this kind is found in 1 Sam 19, where Saul's attempt to arrest David is frustrated by Samuel's wielding of the spirit of God to incapacitate two squads of royal police and then the king himself, reducing them to writhing helplessly on the ground, that is, prophesying. A motive for this story may have been a pro-David/anti-Saul attempt to negate the more positive story of Saul's encounter with the spirit of God in 1 Sam 10. Both stories claim to be the origin of the saying, "Is Saul, too, one of those (crazy) prophets?" (1 Sam 10:11 and 19:24). Whatever the origin of this tale, it turns on the supernatural element and shows creative imagination

Another example demonstrates David's righteousness vis-à-vis Saul through the hero's refusal to kill his pursuer when given the opportunity, and his profession of innocence of malice toward Saul. While the purpose of the story in Dtr's arrangement may be apologetic, its form — in two variant versions with different details (1 Sam 24 and 26) — is heroic adventure, as David and his companions sneak undetected right up to Saul's person. The first is a humorous tale: Saul enters a cave to relieve himself, not realizing that David and his men have chosen to hide in this very place (24:3). While Saul squats in concentration and David's men press themselves to the back of the cave to avoid being seen, David coolly slices the hem off Saul's cloak. That reading may come from an early story of David's bravado. Dtr, of course, has turned it into an apologetic statement: As David snips the garment he is made to express his horror at the thought of violence against YHWH's anointed, and later the cut cloth is shown as evidence in his overly pious plea that he is innocent of any designs on Saul or his throne. The second version in 1 Sam 26, which serves Dtr's identical purpose, is not at all humorous, but it is more heroic in tone. David and his companions penetrate a circle of sleeping guards and make off with Saul's spear and water skin. More characters are involved: Abishai, who volunteers to steal into Saul's camp with David; Ahimelek the Hittite, an unknown follower of David who does not volunteer and about whom we know nothing else — another dead end; and Abner, Saul's army commander, embarrassed by the incompetence of his soldiers. David again refuses to kill Saul, the anointed of YHWH, but this time the scene has greater drama. David's habitual companion Abishai is poised to strike Saul down for the benefit of his friend, but David restrains

him. David's taunting of Abner for his lapse in guarding the king (26:15–16) may have been the original conclusion of this tale of a daring but successful deed before Dtr worked it into a new context.

Longer expansions, especially segments about David's reign as king in 2 Samuel, show more developed narrative techniques which add a moralistic tone to tales of sex, intrigue, and violence. Thus, for example, the theme of sin and retribution drive the story of David and Bathsheba, and the seething resentment of Absalom leads to tragic consequences for all involved. The Bathsheba scandal and the palace intrigues that linked Amnon's rape of Tamar to Absalom's revolt can stand on their own. The suppression of the revolt with the help of a mole in Absalom's entourage, the wise Hushai whose role is to neutralize Absalom's brilliant advisor Ahitophel, along with an elaborate espionage and courier system, compose a tale in which cleverness wins the day (2 Sam 17). Absalom's execution while caught by his hair in a tree and Joab's rebuke of David for mourning for his traitorous son are not details that would appear in royal annals, but make great drama (2 Sam 18–19).

Connecting these stories into a coherent and logical narrative of *hubris* and *nemesis* is not necessarily the work of the Deuteronomist. It does not reinforce Dtr's apologetic aims. David appears weak in his unpreparedness for his son's coup d'état and in his flight from Jerusalem, and he deserves the rebuke from Joab after the battle to cease his mourning for Absalom. More likely the narrative had been put together previously from its discrete parts in what we have been calling the fixed legend.

Development of Characters

In addition to the story's protagonist, certain central characters were developed. Like the loyal Kay and Gawain, the dashing Lancelot, and the scheming Mordred who surrounded Arthur, some of David's loyal retinue (Joab, Abishai) and nemesis (Absalom) became full characters in their own right, each with his own distinguishing features. In what may have been originally separate traditions, stories about the tragic hero Saul, the self-effacing friend Jonathan, and the Merlin-like kingmaker Samuel also found prominent places among the narratives.

The women were given a subordinate but significant role, and sex or romance was a major factor. In her youth Michal, David's prize for valor and daring (1 Sam 18), protected her husband (1 Sam 19); but after a forced separation and equally forced reunion (2 Sam 3), new circumstances led David to spurn her and thus, for personal and/or political reasons, to have no heirs through a daughter of Saul (2 Sam 6). Abigail's attraction to the handsome

outlaw caused the death of her husband Nabal (1 Sam 25). David's seduction of Bathsheba (2 Sam 11) was the act of *hubris* that, like the wrath of Achilles, led to a sea of troubles. Consequently, in the connected narrative of the fixed legend or Dtr, the rape of Tamar (2 Sam 13) began a tragic chain of events within the royal family with implications for the regime. Finally Abishag, the impotent old king's hot water bottle, and Bathsheba herself play significant roles in the succession of Solomon and his consolidation of power (2 Kgs 1–2).[1]

Popular traditions about several other characters likely existed, but they were not incorporated into the text and so were eventually lost. Uriah the Hittite is in the list of the Thirty warriors, but all we know about him is his loyalty to David and his death in the cover-up of his master's adultery with his wife (2 Sam 11). Ahitophel and Hushai, the king's wise men who become rival advisors to Absalom (2 Sam 17), seem to be stock characters whose sage advice and cleverness may have figured also in lost episodes. The interest-raising deeds of Benaiah son of Jehoiada are summarized in such a way in 2 Sam 23 that the longer accounts must have existed at one time. Local chieftains allied to David may have played more prominent roles, such as Barzillai of Gilead, who maintained his support of David despite the execution of his grandsons, the children of Merab (2 Sam 21); Shobi of Rabbah, son of Nahash, probably set up by David as ruler of Ammon after the defeat of his brother Hanun; and Machir of Lo-debar, who had once hosted (protected?) Mephibaal (2 Sam 9:4–6). One hint of this is the added information in 2 Sam 17 that appears to go nowhere: While the aged Barzillai could not join David's immediate retinue, his son Kimham was sent to be one of David's companions. Why bother to mention this information if Barzillai and Kimham did not figure in other events, the latter in his role of a fresh face at David's court? One may conjure up the image of a new knight at King Arthur's Round Table.

Poetry or Prose?

What literary form did the early episodes about people and events take, and, subsequently, what was the form of the "fixed legend" in which these episodes were worked into longer narratives? On three occasions the biblical text cites preexisting poetry: David's lament for Saul and Jonathan from the Scroll of Yashar in 2 Sam 1, the unattributed lament for Abner in 2 Sam 3, and the one line of song (1 Sam 18:7) in which the women praise David's military prowess over Saul's. Sheba son of Bichri's cry of revolt, "We have

1. See summary of women's roles in B. Halpern, *David's Secret Demons,* 398.

no portion in David/And no inheritance in the son of Jesse./ To your tents, Israel!" (2 Sam 20:1) has parallelism and may be taken from a poetic account. As tempting as it is to posit major works of epic poetry underlying the present narrative, three, possibly four, citations are insufficient evidence for such a hypothesis. On the one hand, the Scroll of Yashar is quoted also in a military context in Joshua, and it is not unreasonable to assume that there were poetic collections about Israel's early heroes in circulation before the time of the Deuteronomist. On the other hand, if the heroic poems included numerous episodes in the lives of figures from Joshua through David, it is extremely surprising that they were not cited more often. It is possible, of course, that much of the account we have is a systematic prosification of a poetic text or texts, but there is no linguistic evidence to demonstrate that. More likely, the David tradition drew on some poetic material, whose scope is impossible to ascertain, along with prose traditions.

While not insisting on poetic form, R. A. Carlson, in *David, the Chosen King* (1964) thought that the story of David had been influenced by themes from the Ugaritic epic of Keret.[2] Most noteworthy is the similarity of Absalom's revolt to the attempt by Keret's son Yassib to replace his father as king after asserting that Keret had become incapable as a judge. Also relevant are the parallel traditions that David and Keret were both one of seven brothers,[3] the similarity of the procession of the ark to Jerusalem with Keret's march to Udum, and the parallels between YHWH's promises to David in 2 Sam 7 and El's oracle to Keret concerning his heirs. The plot of a hero's rise and fall in the story of Saul (and also Samson) is characteristic of epic and follows a "principle of epic composition."[4] According to Carlson the Deuteronomist found and combined several epic units, which he hardly reshaped, in his story of David.[5] In my analysis, something like this very thing was more likely to have taken shape before Dtr.

Some of the narrative about David may derive its form from nonepic Bronze Age prose motifs. An inscription on the statue of Idrimi of Alalakh contains the king's "autobiography." After the death of his father in a revolt, Idrimi fled to live first among the Sutu warriors in the wilderness, then in Canaan, and finally for seven years with the Apiru. Eventually he found favor with the Mitanni king and was restored to his rightful kingdom in

2. R. A. Carlson, *David, the Chosen King: A Traditio-Historical Approach to the Second Book of Samuel* (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1964), 190ff.

3. Carlson cites H.-U. Nubel's thesis, *David's Aufstieg in der fruhe israelitischen Geschichtsschreibung* (Bonn Diss., 1959), 19f., on the theme of the exaltation of the youngest son over his brothers in the Keret epic and David cycle. Cf. C. Gordon, *Introduction to Old Testament Times* (Ventnor, N.J.: Ventnor Publications, 1953).

4. Carlson, *David, the Chosen King,* 143.

5. Ibid., 22, 43.

Alalakh. He was reconciled with his brothers, who controlled other city-states, he plundered Hittite coastal cities, and he built himself a palace. Idrimi reigned thirty years and handed over his kingdom to his son (the occasion for the inscription). The return of the hero to his inheritance after a period of living in the wilderness with outlaws is also a theme in David's rise to power. Lemche regards it as originally a theme from a fairy tale. Whether fairy tale, legend, or royal propaganda, its use in molding the framework of the story of David's rise to power has been widely suggested.[6]

Van Seters, on the other hand, looked to literature more contemporary with the Deuteronomic corpus for clues to the nature of the sources. While he identified some early elements in the story of Saul and the story of David's rise, he gave the Deuteronomist more credit as the creator of the present text. Dtr collected popular stories, combined them into groups, and imposed chronological sequence. The stories, moreover, were not fragments of poetic or prose epic, but popular tales similar to the *logoi* collected and organized by the Greek historian Herodotus in the fifth century. The Hebrew Bible and Herodotus also share a framework of divine retribution and the use of prolepsis. Van Seters thinks it would be helpful if Herodotus and the Bible were studied together.[7]

In the *Persian Wars* Herodotus assembled a large number of independent units — tales, antiquarian pieces, travelers' descriptions, gossip, fictional speeches, and imaginary debates — to spice up his historical narrative. He himself comments that some of these *logoi* are not worthy of belief and sometimes he presents alternate versions. Herodotus also imposes a *hubris-nemesis* theme on his work, though not in the systematic way the Deuteronomist imposes his covenant-based scheme of divine reward and punishment. Van Seters suggests that a comparison of the Deuteronomist's work with Herodotus's incorporation of independent *logoi* into a work of intended historiography is more apt than the model of an editor imposing an ideological framework on complete and lengthy preexisting accounts such as the Ark Narrative or the History of David's Rise, or on a prose version of segments of epic poetry.

Collecting Traditions and Fixing the Legend

The comparison with Herodotus is also useful for a sense of pace in the development of traditions. The main events in the *Persian Wars* begin with

6. N. P. Lemche, *Ancient Israel,* 54; H. Reviv, "Alalakh," in *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (Jerusalem: Macmillan, 1971), 1:507. On Idrimi see L. Woolley, *A Forgotten Kingdom* (Baltimore: Penguin, 1953), 118ff.

7. Van Seters, *In Search of History,* 35–40.

the expansion of the Medes into Asia Minor in the first half of the sixth century and the conquests of Cyrus in the middle of that century. The text then concentrates on the Persian attacks on Greece by Darius in 490 and Xerxes in 480. One would expect that Herodotus's stories about the distant early days of Greece would include obviously nonhistorical legends; but he was writing only thirty to forty years after the Persian invasions, and legends already abound in his book even about the relatively recent events involving Cyrus, Darius, and Xerxes as well as the Greek tyrants and other civic leaders who were their contemporaries. He says (I.95) that he is following what he thinks is the true story of Cyrus from Persian sources, but he knows three additional versions which differ from the one he has chosen, which, he insists, relates the simple truth rather than magnifying Cyrus's exploits. The details that follow, then, are just Herodotus's intuition as to what is historical and what is legend. The life of Cyrus (I.107ff.) includes a mantic dream and the famous childhood episode, parallel to the infancy tales of Moses, Sargon of Agade, Oedipus, and Romulus and Remus, in which the incumbent Median king Astyages, warned by a dream, attempts to do away with a potential usurper by having the child killed. Instead Cyrus is spared by a clever official and raised by a herdsman. If this is the "historical" version, what sort of bizarre material might have been in the other versions?

Further on in the text Darius is chosen king in an improbable story involving a clever groom, a stallion, and a mare in heat (II.85–87)! Herodotus states that he doesn't believe one particular story he reports about Xerxes' return from Greece (VIII.118f.), in which a host of Persian soldiers jump overboard to their deaths during a storm to lighten the load of a ship on which the king is traveling. The event would have occurred in 480, only a generation before the historian's work, so the tall tale had little time in which to develop. We can only guess at the source (harem conspiracy rumors?) of a tragic tale of sexual passion in which the Persian royal family is torn by violence, with most of the blood being shed by Xerxes' queen Amestris (IX.108ff.).

Logoi that are clearly imaginative tales and legends about real historical figures had thus developed in a period from a little over a century to about thirty years after the events. While Herodotus knew old traditions going back to the Trojan War, he collected a large number of items from relatively recent history which had already been transmitted as unusual tales or at least as stories with fictional embellishments. It did not require an interval of centuries for legends to grow, and Herodotus recognized that even the relatively recent accounts were not necessarily historical.

There was an interval of four hundred years between David and the earliest dating of the Deuteronomist, ample time for the growth of a body of

tales and legends that could not be taken for historical fact. But if Herodotus is a guide, many of these legends could have been produced and reworked in much less time. The short notices about David's heroes, for example, are based on traditions that *may* have been formed very soon after the Davidic age and survived for centuries. But they *may* also be Deuteronomistic summaries of warrior tales that were created much more recently to flesh out and enhance the life of David. Such *logoi* are impossible to date accurately.

Popular literature about the Golden Age grew, and a late-monarchical date may indeed be suggested for the collection of *logoi* and the fixing of the secular legendary tradition. This body of literature was later used and reshaped by the Deuteronomist and then revised by the Chronicler. The Arthurian tradition also demonstrates the long-term survival of brief versions of folk tales, even through a literary dark age, and the gradual growth of new stories. Then, once the legend of Arthur had been fixed in a literary work, there occurred increased literary activity, including revisions of the fixed story and creative additions.

Geoffrey of Monmouth claimed to have as a source for his history an ancient book whose existence was questioned even in his own day. But he did use other sources, for example, Gildas. That is known because he reused phrases from Gildas. However, as Barber says about Geoffrey's *History,* "he had to create so much of it himself, lacking the raw material."[8] He produced a "romantic rather than factual history"[9] to provide a national epic of a proud past for the Britons, and an emperor-hero in Arthur.[10] Despite attacks on Geoffrey's book as a work of fables, it was popularly accepted at the time as history and became the authoritative work.

Herodotus indicates that he used many sources, both named, like Hecataeus of Miletus, and unattributed, such as the many items of fact, hearsay, and gossip he picked up on his travels. But he was more than a collector; he selected material, sometimes demythologized it, arranged it, and superimposed upon it conceptual themes such as *hubris-nemesis* and the opposition of Europe and Asia, and political themes such as the deliverance of Greece and the rise of Athens.[11] We do not know how much detail he made up, if any. Gilbert Murray described his work as "a deep unconscious romanticising of the past by men's own memories."[12] As Homer was the authority for the distant Greek past, Herodotus became the authority for

8. Barber, *King Arthur: Hero and Legend,* 25.
9. Ibid., 27.
10. Barber, *King Arthur, in Legend and History,* 45f.
11. G. Murray, *The Literature of Ancient Greece* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956), 140.
12. Ibid., 151.

the Persian Wars, and "no historian ever attempted to write a version either to correct or to supplement Herodotus' account."[13]

Van Seters would see the Deuteronomist as the authoritative historiographer of Israel's past. Though the Chronicler did attempt to produce a politically correct revision, it never supplanted Samuel–Kings. Dtr collected, selected, and superimposed religious and political themes to a greater extent than Herodotus. Dtr put the material into a sequence according to his design, and thus created the whole: a national history which became canonical.[14] For Van Seters Dtr is responsible for "fixing the legend" (my term, not Van Seters's) of Israel's past, and therefore the story of David as well.

But the David material, more voluminous than material about any other person or topic from Joshua through 2 Kings, bears little of Dtr's characteristic polemic against foreign worship. It is the only part of Samuel–Kings in which nonprophetic poetry is cited, and contains romantic adventures quite unlike the rest of Kings. Dtr did not need this mountain of detail about David to make a point about the origin and legitimacy of the dynasty. Some of it — the parts strategically omitted by the Chronicler — even runs counter to his purpose; there was no reason for him to invent it. The David cycle must have existed in much like its present form before the time of Dtr. Otherwise Dtr would not have been able to take some narrative material — the feats of David's heroic warriors — abbreviate it, and place it near the end of the narrative as an appendix. If it wasn't required for Dtr's narrative, why include it at all, unless it would have been missed as an integral part of a well-known story or cycle of stories? The real fixing of the David legend must have been prior to Dtr, probably before the exile. It amounts to what Gunn termed his "postulated original." In using it, Dtr gave it postexilic authority, though now in a form that included Dtr's religio-political framework and comments.

The Orality Factor

A discussion of traditional materials — their origins, transformations, and merger into collections — must include the issue of orality and its relation to the written text. The works of Milman Parry, Albert Lord, and John Miles Foley on oral and oral-based literature have established approaches and criteria for the study of many genres ranging from ancient epic to contemporary storytelling.[15] In relation to our topic, Raymond Person's *The*

13. N. Austin, *The Greek Historians* (New York: Van Nostrand-Reinhold, 1969), 9.
14. Van Seters, 361f.
15. E.g., M. Parry, *The Making of Homeric Verse: The Collected Papers of Milman Parry* (ed. A. Parry; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971); A. Lord, *The Singer of Tales* (New York:

Deuteronomic School freely cites their work in his attempt to define the Deuteronomic school, or guild, of scribes as "literate members of a primarily oral society" whose orientation allowed them to be not merely copyists but also creative "performers of the tradition."[16] They saw multiple versions of some stories as narrative alternatives rather than variant readings of a single written tradition or *textus receptus*.[17]

Person relies most on a major work by Susan Niditch, *Oral World and Written Word: Ancient Israelite Literature* (1996),[18] which has implications for our discussion of the David narrative. Niditch, also citing the groundbreaking studies of Parry, Lord, Foley, and others, applies an understanding of the interaction between orality — composition and performance — and the development of written texts to biblical literature. She entertains the possibility that some of the David material — portions of what she calls the "bardic war tradition" — originated in the court of David or Solomon, most likely in oral form or perhaps written down "by an author sensitive to and influenced by oral aesthetics. . . . Such tales of David and earlier bandit chiefs are manly tales of battle and conquest, of booty and bravery, of treachery and vengeance, exalting Israel's leaders and seem the appropriate purview of courtly composers."[19]

How does the oral tradition become a written one? Niditch provides four models:[20]

1. Oral performance is dictated and copied by insiders or outsiders wishing to preserve poems, oracles, and/or speeches.
2. Portions of longer narratives — myths, stories of ancestors and heroes, early history of the group — are shaped in content and theme ("slow crystallization") through frequent performance to responsive audiences. At some point the traditions are written down by someone familiar with the stories, eventually becoming more "fixed."[21] What

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Atheneum, 1968); J. M. Foley, *Immanent Art: From Structure to Meaning in Traditional Oral Epic* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), and *The Singer of Tales in Performance* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995).

16. Person, *The Deuteronomic School,* 89.

17. Ibid., 95f., and citing Shemaryahu Talmon, "Aspects of the Textual Transmission of the Bible in the Light of Qumran Manuscripts," in *Qumran and the History of the Biblical Text* (ed. F. Cross and S. Talmon; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975), 228.

18. S. Niditch, *Oral World and Written Word: Ancient Israelite Literature* (Library of Ancient Israel; Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996).

19. Ibid., 113.

20. Ibid., 117–30.

21. Niditch cites Gregory Nagy, *Greek Mythology and Poetics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990).

emerges is a pan-Israelite national history and/or myth stressing unity and consensus.

3. Initially written composition by authors in conscious literary imitation of oral technique and style.
4. Written compositions based on previously existing written sources.

The Bible, as a collection of such material in the Persian period, was not a book but a library of oral and written works, with variants, that contained the "essential shared expressions of a people's worldview and self-definition."[22]

Model #1, that is, transcription of performance, accounts for the preservation of prophetic speeches and oracles, and perhaps poems like the Scroll of Yashar, assuming written copies existed at some point. The best example of #4, written text based on written source, as cited by Niditch, is 1–2 Chronicles' use and revision of Samuel–Kings. But for most of the biblical material on David, Models #2, slow crystallization of pan-Israelite story, and #3, literary imitation of oral style, are instructive for the growth of the tradition and both early and late (post-Dtr) written additions to existing texts. The "fixed" or crystallized but still not static collection of narratives of the pan-Israelite story comes very close to Gunn's "postulated original" and my "fixed legend." While some of its components may go back to early bardic or folk origins, the oral character of the culture — which influences writing as well — allows the tradition to grow though new stories and alternative tellings of existing episodes.

Uses of the Legend: Samuel–Kings and Beyond

The Deuteronomic history incorporated much of the David legend, rearranged and abbreviated some of the material, and manipulated it to fit the themes of the larger work. The hypothesis of Frank M. Cross that there were earlier and later editions of the history makes for interesting possibilities.[23] According to Cross the first edition of Dtr was preexilic, a product of the age of Josiah, who alone, of all the kings, escapes criticism in the text. The sins of Jeroboam's secession and establishment of a counter-shrine in Israel were finally punished by the Assyrian destruction of the northern kingdom (see the sermon in 2 Kgs 17). David's faithfulness assured a guarantee against the destruction of Judah, which was resurgent under Josiah to the point of annexing territory that had been part of the old northern

22. Niditch, *Oral World and Written Word,* 116f.
23. Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic,* 278ff.

kingdom. Such a theme would be unlikely for a postexilic writer who knew of the failure of Josiah's successors to maintain the dynasty, and who may have witnessed the destruction of Judah by the Babylonians. Cross calls the first recension of Dtr a programmatic doctrine of reform and revival of the state. The second recension was produced ca. 550 and added material explaining that the destruction and exile of Judah were traceable to the sins of Menasseh.

If we follow Cross's hypothesis, the compiler/redactor of the first Deuteronomic recension must have used traditions that existed prior to the 620s. He did not avoid stories that were uncomplimentary to David but did rearrange and abbreviate. All he really required for his propagandistic agenda was a summary of David's accomplishments and the oracle of Nathan (2 Sam 7) which established the dynastic promise, but he found extensive popular heroic traditions about the founder of the kingdom. Their popularity and their celebration of Israel's Golden Age made them impossible to ignore, they made good reading, and with a little manipulation they could serve his cause. The second recension of Dtr added passages from the perspective of exile, but aside from 1 Sam 12:25, a warning of destruction appended to Samuel's speech, the account of the early monarchy was left alone.

In this scenario the fixing of the David legend would have been complete at the latest shortly after the mid-seventh century, and the details would have been well known by the first edition of Dtr, which omitted many. They may still have been known at the time of the second edition of Dtr, but that is not as certain.

If we reject Cross's theory of a Josianic edition and posit the existence only of a single postexilic Dtr, we must conclude that the details were still known in the sixth century when Dtr alluded to them. In this case the fixing of the legend may have been as late as the last years of Judah or the early years of exile after 586. Josianic nationalism, which outlived Josiah and produced the ill-considered revolts against Babylon, may in fact have provided the setting for a collection of material about the Golden Age of the dynasty's foundation, against which Josiah's annexation of parts of the old northern kingdom might have been seen as a repetition of David's unification of Israel.

But Dtr, regardless of its date, became an authoritative text in the postexilic period, and *its* story of David — rather than the details of the secular version — was the one that was remembered. The dislocation of the exile and the return to Zion produced a short dark age in which popular traditions were forgotten, while the traditions sanctioned by the priesthood became the official and exclusive version of the past. When a new interpretation of Israel's history appeared in 1 and 2 Chronicles late in the Persian

period, it was, for the history of the monarchy, a revision of Dtr. Chronicles eliminated negative material about David, added details that made him king by popular acclamation, and associated him with the planning and staffing of the temple that Solomon would build. The omissions and additions are clearly programmatic. None of the tendentious and nontendentious changes can be traced with any degree of probability to independent preexilic traditions not found in Dtr. Sometimes Chronicles has a better reading than Dtr. For example, in the hero notices, Chronicles has the more plausible names — Elhanan son of Ya'ir rather than son of Ya'are Oregim (2 Sam 21:19//1 Chr 20:5), and Yeshav'am rather than Yoshev Bashevet (2 Sam 23:8//1 Chr 11:11). But that is most likely because its text has been transmitted more accurately than Dtr, not because the Chronicler had access to a pre-Dtr version of the story different from the one used by Dtr. The apologetic tendency of Chronicles' revision is demonstrated in that same passage when 2 Sam 21:19's Elhanan "the Bethlehemite's [slaying of] Goliath of Gath" becomes in 1 Chr 20:5 Elhanan's slaying of "Lahmi the brother of Goliath of Gath," thus preserving David's personal victory over the real Goliath.[24]

Later accounts of David in Ben Sira, Josephus, and Pseudo-Philo are based only on the official versions of Dtr and Chronicles. Whatever they add is explanatory or, in the case of Pseudo-Philo, midrash-like. While Josephus provides stories from old or newer traditions about Moses' youth to fill the gaps in the biblical narrative (*Ant.* ii), he has no such additional material about David. Thus details of the popular David traditions that did not appear in Samuel–Kings were lost to the collective memory of Judaeans, along with earlier poetic texts like the Scroll of Yashar and the Book of the Wars of YHWH cited in Numbers.

The Relevance of Herodotus

Van Seters's work on Herodotus and Dtr has been discussed above several times in reference to the historiographical technique of collecting and arranging *logoi*. But the contents of the *Persian Wars* may also offer helpful suggestions about the development of the David legend.

Jan Wim Wesselius's monograph, *The Origin of the History of Israel: Herodotus' Histories as Blueprint for the First Books of the Bible* (2002),[25]

24. G. Auld, "Re-reading Samuel (Historically)," 163ff., suggests a common source for the synoptic parts of Samuel–Kings and Chronicles.

25. J. W. Wesselius, *The Origin of the History of Israel: Herodotus' Histories as Blueprint for the First Books of the Bible* (JSOT Supplement 345; London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002).

presents a theory that may be summarized as follows: The biblical history from Genesis through 2 Kings is, in its final redaction, a unitary work that shows knowledge and influence of Herodotus, especially in structural details, and thus must be dated in the late fifth century, shortly after the *Persian Wars* appeared. Using earlier sources, it was "a continuous account of the history of the people of Israel from the creation of the world to the Babylonian Exile as observed from the point of view of a pious Jew living some time after the last event described in it, the release of king Jehoiachin . . . around 560 B.C.E."[26] Its purpose may have been "to assist in restructuring Jewish life in Jerusalem and also, albeit at a somewhat slower pace, in diaspora communities such as that of Elephantine."[27]

According to Wesselius the influence of Herodotus on the Bible can best be seen in a series of structural parallels in the narratives about Joseph and Cyrus, Abraham and Cyaxares, and Moses and Xerxes.[28] Common elements appear in the stories of Joseph and Cyrus: mantic dreams, colored garments, attempts to kill the protagonist and the intervention of two figures, killing of wild animals, and changes in names when the heroes come to power. Abraham and Cyaxares, the great-grandfathers of Joseph and Cyrus, fight nocturnal battles and receive foreign visitors. Moses' leadership in the exodus from Egypt and Xerxes' invasion of Greece feature misgivings prior to the project, dry-land crossings of bodies of water from one continent to another, the death of many on the march, darkening of the sun's light, failure to arrive at the goals of the journeys, and activity of seers.[29] The attempt of a large host marching to conquer a country on another continent is the common plot of the Moses and Xerxes narratives. The details are different, but the structures are "congruent."

Wesselius cites other parallels, the most noteworthy of which are in the Egyptian plagues and events that befall Xerxes' army, and in elements of genealogies: there are seven generations from Terah to Moses and from Phraortes to Xerxes, with Cyxares/Abraham, Cyrus/Joseph, and Xerxes/

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26. Ibid., 101f.
27. Ibid., 71.
28. Ibid., chap. 1, 1–47.
29. Joseph's dreams, colored coat, brothers' plot, intervention of Reuben and Judah, alleged killing by animal (Gen 37); dreams of Astyages, attempt to kill child, intervention of Harpagus and herdsman, Cyrus's colored garment, alleged killing by wild animal (Herodotus I.107–113). Name changes (Gen 41 and Herodotus I.113f.). Abraham and Cyaxares' nocturnal battles (Gen 14; Herodotus I.74); receiving visitors (Gen 18; Herodotus I.106). Moses and Xerxes: misgivings (Exod 4; Herodotus VII.5); intercontinental water crossing (Exod 14f.; Herodotus VII.33ff., bridge of boats across Hellespont); casualties on march (Numbers and Herodotus VII–IX passim); darkening of sun (Exod 10; Herodotus VII.37); failure to succeed (Deut 32, 34; Herodotus VIII.88ff.); seers (Balaam, Num 22–24; Dikaios, Herodotus VIII.65).

Moses commonly representing the second, fifth, and seventh generations, respectively.

One may take issue with many of these examples. Some of the narrative parallels are not really clear. The genealogies are arbitrarily selected: Why begin with Terah and Phraortes? Why not count Median generations from Deioces, the founder of the dynasty, with whom Herodotus actually begins his narrative of the Medes and Persians? Specific criticisms aside, Wisselius seeks to overpower reluctant readers with the sheer quantity of examples and with the broad structural parallels.

Whether or not this approach is convincing, there are, in fact, Herodotean parallels also with the biblical story of Saul and David, an area not extensively examined by Wesselius. *Persian Wars* I.96–101 relates how Deioces united the six Median tribes into a nation. The Medes were under Assyrian domination, living in scattered villages with no central authority and therefore a tendency to lawlessness. Deioces, a man of renown in his own village, achieved a reputation as an honest and successful judge and won the confidence of the surrounding population. He retired, citing a desire to attend to his own affairs, whereupon crime and anarchy returned. In response the Medes assembled and declared, "let us therefore set a king over us." Deioces was their logical choice. He had a city built (Ecbatana) and a palace within it, fortified the walls enclosing the palace, and settled people outside the walls. His son Phraortes (I.102) annexed Persia to become the head of two nations, and began the fight for independence against the Assyrians, a process completed by his successor Cyaxares (I.103ff.). We may compare the selection of Saul (1 Sam 8ff.) in response to the demand of the Israelites. A king was needed to establish law and order after the anarchical conditions described at the end of Judges and to withstand Philistine domination. After his anointment Saul retired to his home in Gibeah. His leadership during a subsequent emergency, the Ammonite attack on Gilead, brought him back into prominence. He was acclaimed king, and thus united the twelve tribes. As for residential construction, it was David who, after his coronation at Hebron (2 Sam 5), appropriated Jerusalem as his city, extended the residential area outside the walls, and had a palace built within. This new king had defeated the northern tribes and thus became the ruler of two nations, Judah and Israel. He went on to free the country from the domination of the Philistines.

While there are well-known elements in the legend of Cyrus's birth and youth that parallel the stories of Moses and Joseph, the revolt of Cyrus against Astyages the Mede (I.107ff.), who had previously tried to kill him, and the resultant Persian hegemony have broad points of similarity to David's usurpation of Saul's throne and the defeat of the northern

tribes by Judah. In both cases imperial expansion follows. The episode in 1 Sam 13 in which the priest/prophet Samuel insists that Saul must await his presence before a prebattle sacrifice may be offered has an interesting parallel in *Persian Wars* I.132. There, as part of his description of Persian customs, Herodotus informs us that no legal sacrifice may be offered without a Magus being present. He had previously stated (I.131) that the Persians have no images of the gods. When a Magus claiming (falsely, according to Herodotus) to be Cambyses' brother Smerdis seized the Persian throne, he took over Cambyses' harem, taking the women to be his own wives (III.68). This is reported matter-of-factly, in contrast to the sensationalist story of Absalom's public usurpation of David's harem in 2 Sam 16, seen as fulfillment of prophecy. Herodotus relates that Peisistratus of Athens made peace with his rival Megacles by marrying his daughter. But not wishing to have children by her (because her family was under an old curse), he never had complete intercourse with her (I.61). David avoided creating new descendants of Saul by refusing to have children with his wife Michal, Saul's daughter (2 Sam 6).

The theodicy of Dtr, that descendants are punished for the sins of their ancestors, appears in connection with David just after his death. In 1 Kgs 2 Solomon dismisses the priest Abiathar from his position. The text here does not mention Abiathar's support of Adonijah against Solomon, the plausible reason for his removal, but explains that his dismissal was to fulfill YHWH's punishment of the sins of Eli, from whom Abiathar was descended. This concept of delayed punishment appears in Herodotus in the tale of the Lydian regicide Gyges, who founded a new dynasty. The Delphic oracle predicted the fall of the dynasty five generations later as punishment for the sin of Gyges (I.8–13). The fifth ancestor of Gyges was Croesus, who lost his kingdom to Cyrus. Croesus had been a benefactor of Delphi, and Apollo himself had attempted to alter his destiny by putting off the collapse of Lydia until after Croesus's lifetime. Apollo could get Croesus only an additional three years of rule, but even he could not change the decision of the Fates (I.91). The story of Josiah in 2 Kgs 22 offers a close parallel, but with a different outcome. When the newly discovered scroll of the law was taken to the prophetess Huldah for verification, she added a message for the king: Judah was to fall for the sins of Menasseh, but Josiah's piety led YHWH to grant him dispensation and delay the destruction until after his death.

Herodotus often quotes Homer, as Dtr cites the Scroll of Yashar. Before the accession of Darius, the Persian nobles give speeches about what form of government is best (III.80ff.); before the selection of Saul, Samuel gives a sermon about kingship (1 Sam 8). Parallels such as these, and others from among those cited above, are not so easily interpreted as dependence of one

literary work upon another. Many writers quoted earlier literature. Samuel's speech on kingship, his farewell address (1 Sam 12), and other Deuteronomic insertions are editorial devices that belong to the religious framework of Dtr, in which divine punishment for covenant violations is the major theme. The debate of the Persian nobles, in contrast, is a display of Herodotus's rhetorical skills on the subject of monarchy, oligarchy, or democracy as the best constitution of the state. Structural parallelism, especially where there is no real parallelism of purpose or detail, and where it is not immediately apparent, cannot prove dependence.

A considerable list of narrative parallels, however, when other evidence of related literary borrowing exists, may indeed be significant. Herodotus was a traveler and collector of information. His arrangement of *logoi* reproduces, with his own understanding of the material, what he had read and heard. The realistic and fanciful descriptions of Persian and Egyptian history and culture, for example, are based on first- or secondhand contact with written or oral sources. The story of Darius's accession comes from the king's official propaganda found in the inscription on the famous Rock of Behistun. The Magian usurper claimed to be Cambyses' brother Bardiya (Smerdis), whom Cambyses had killed. The official account of the overthrow of Pseudo-Smerdis by Darius and the nobles was, according to E. Bickerman, an invented story to cover up the real usurpation by Darius.[30] But this official version by Darius is the one that Herodotus adopted, followed also by Ctesias and other Greek and Latin authors.

If Herodotus knew Persian traditions, certainly literate Judaeans who lived in the Persian Empire and who regarded the Persians, at least at first, as benefactors, must have been acquainted with such traditions. Morton Smith demonstrated the use of Cyrus's political propaganda by Deutero-Isaiah (Marduk/YHWH leading Cyrus by the hand to conquer Babylon), and further, the appearance of identical theological themes and styles of expression ("Who spread out the heavens?" etc.) in Deutero-Isaiah and the early stratum of Zoroastrian literature (Gathas, Yasna 44 in the Avesta).[31] Official and popular stories about the Persian kings, and gossip and news about the royal court must have circulated widely. Jews in Babylon and Jerusalem considered Cyrus a deliverer and sponsor of the resettlement of Judaea, and Darius a patron of the Temple's reconstruction (Isa 41:2; 44:28; 45:1; Ezra 1:1ff.; 6:1ff.). Frequent comings and goings of administrators and soldiers,

30. E. Bickerman, "Darius, Pseudo-Smerdis, and the Magi," *Athenaeum* 56 (1978): 239–61, and in M. Smith and E. Gabba, eds., *Religions and Politics in the Hellenistic and Roman Periods* (Biblioteca di Athenaeum 5; Como: Edizione New Press, 1985), 619–41. Bickerman was commenting on M. Dandamaev, *Persien unter den ersten Achaemeniden,* 1976.

31. M. Smith, "II Isaiah and the Persians," *JAOS* 83 (1963): 415–21.

and correspondence between Jerusalem and other communities within the empire are attested by the books of Ezra and Nehemiah and the papyri from Elephantine. The point to be made is that if Herodotean material on the Persians based on Persian sources down to the time of Xerxes appears in biblical parallels, that material may have come independently and directly to the Judaean writers from Persian sources, and not from Herodotus.

If the final shapers of Dtr used themes from Persian traditions, a reasonable date for their work might be the middle of the fifth century, approximately the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, when the Pentateuch was also being given its final form. (A tradition in 2 Macc 2:13 has Nehemiah founding a library and collecting the books about the kings and prophets as well as the writings of David and epistles by the [Israelite? Persian?] kings about votive offerings.) As the ancestral laws of the nation were compiled and declared authoritative (i.e., by sanction of the Persian government; Bickerman calls Artaxerxes I the final Mosaic lawgiver[32]), the history of the nation was also written in an authoritative edition. Contrary to the most radical of the minimalists, there is no compelling reason to believe that all of this literature was an invention of the Persian period rather than a selected, reworked, and redacted collection of previously existing legal and narrative traditions. The use of Persian narrative motifs would belong only to the last stage in the development of the story of David in Samuel–Kings.

Let us digress to examine a case in which a tale becomes "history": the story of the Lydian ruler, Gyges.[33] The historical figure is known from the Rassam Cylinder in Nineveh, a record of the reign of the Assyrian King Ashurbanipal (668–627). Gugu of Ludi defeated the Cimmerians and attempted to forge an alliance with the Egyptian King Psammetichus (664ff.), who had become independent of Assyria. Ashurbanipal prayed successfully for Gugu's demise, since his territory was indeed again overrun by the Cimmerians. Gugu's son later acknowledged Assyrian dominance. So much for the archaeological record.

The larger tale of Gyges, as he is called in Greek, is best known from Herodotus. But we begin with fragments of Nicolaus of Damascus (first century B.C.E.), who appears to have a simpler version of the story, probably derived, as is surmised, from the lost history of Lydia by Xanthus (written between 465 and 425).[34] Daskylos, an enemy of the Heraclidae who ruled Lydia, had fled the country to a place near Sinope. A relative succeeded at

32. Bickerman, *The Jews in the Greek Age,* 30.

33. The relevant texts are collected in T. B. Jones, *Paths to the Ancient Past* (New York: Free Press, 1967), 70ff.

34. Ibid., 71. This particular fragment is from Constantinus Porphyrogennetos of the tenth century. See J. Jacoby, *FHG,* part 2a, section 90, subsections 46–47 (349ff.).

getting him recalled, but Daskylos decided to remain where he was, sending instead his son Gyges, an attractive eighteen-year-old who was good at military arts. The Lydian king, Sadyattes, made Gyges one of his bodyguards, but he became suspicious of him and secretly attempted to have him killed by giving him dangerous assignments. These attempts failed, and the king relented. Sadyattes married Tudo, daughter of the king of Mysia. Gyges, in charge of the troop that accompanied her to Lydia, fell in love with her and tried to seduce her. She reported him to the king, but Gyges, forewarned, saved himself by assassinating Sadyattes in his sleep, whereupon he took the throne. Gyges killed his opponents, but was reconciled with the resentful populace after the Delphic oracle confirmed his reign. The oracle, however, prophesied vengeance in the fifth generation. Gyges then married Tudo.

The more famous version of the tale is in Herodotus I.7–16, perhaps also dependent on Xanthus's *Lydiaca*.[35] Here Candaules (as the king is called) wished to show off the beauty of his wife (unnamed) to his trusted bodyguard Gyges son of Daskylos. Gyges declined, but Candaules insisted, and hid Gyges in the queen's chamber so that he might see her naked. The queen discovered his presence and, disgraced, gave him the option of being executed or of killing the king and replacing him. Gyges stabbed Candaules to death in his bed, married the queen, and took the throne. He was confirmed by the Delphic oracle and accepted by the Lydians, but the oracle predicted vengeance in the fifth generation. Herodotus's account is actually longer than Nicolaus's; it begins with the prior history of the Heraclid dynasty and ends with the deeds of Gyges as king and those of his descendants. Gyges himself reigned thirty-eight years; he sent offerings to Delphi and had military successes at Miletus, Smyrna, and Colophon. Herodotus remarks that Gyges is mentioned in a poem by Archilochus of Paros.

A different set of details is found in Plato, *Republic* II.359D–360B (fourth century). Here Gyges[36] was a shepherd of the king of Lydia. A storm and earthquake revealed an opening in the ground in which he found, among other marvels, a corpse with a ring on its finger hidden inside a hollow bronze horse. The shepherd took the ring and discovered that when he turned it he became invisible. He managed to be appointed a messenger of the king. Using his power of invisibility, he seduced the queen, killed the king, and seized power.

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35. Ephoros (*Athen.*xii 515,d) thought Herodotus used Xanthus for his material on Lydia. See Jones, *Paths to the Ancient Past,* 71, and K. F. Smith, "The Tale of Gyges and the King of Lydia," *American Journal of Philology* 23 (1902): 277.

36. Mss. of the *Republic* read "an ancestor of Gyges," but it is apparent from the story that Gyges, who became king of Lydia, is meant.

Plutarch, *Greek Questions,* XLV (early second century C.E.) has an etiological story on a completely different theme. The Heraclidae of Lydia had an axe taken by Heracles from Hippolyte. Candaules gave it to a companion to carry. Gyges rebelled against the king, and with an ally killed Candaules and his companion. He took the axe to Caria and placed it into the hand of a statue of Zeus, now named Labrandeus after "labrys," the Lydian word for axe.

Finally, a passage in Photius (ninth-century C.E.) derived from Ptolemy Chennos (first-century C.E.) relates that Candaules' wife had a dragon stone that gave her keen sight, so that she spotted Gyges as he attempted to sneak out of her chamber after seeing her naked.

K. F. Smith's synthetic reconstruction of the story poses Gyges as a popular hero around whom many traditions were gathered.[37] The "original" material is a folk tale whose introduction is cited in the selection from Plato. In the hypothetical archetype the shepherd discovered all sorts of wonders (the details now lost) in addition to the magical ring. His adventures through invisibility (details also lost) brought him to the attention of the king. The cruel ruler gave him difficult tasks, which Gyges performed with the help of the ring. The king wished to show off his wife to Gyges, now a royal advisor. Gyges fell in love with her and used the ring to see her naked. But with the help of the dragon stone — she was herself a sorceress — she discovered him and gave him the option to kill or be killed. He chose the former and won both the wife and the kingdom.

Smith thought Herodotus's source was less likely to have been Xanthus than the folk tale, which Herodotus rationalized by dropping the magic ring and its marvels from his narrative. Where Xanthus (via Nicolaus) made Gyges the seducer, Herodotus presented him as a relative innocent, perhaps because the Delphic oracular tradition had a favorable view of Gyges.[38] Smith dismissed Plutarch's axe tale as an etiological fable unrelated to the basic legend.

Smith may have been mistaken in attempting to reconstruct an archetypal legend. Independent tales and variations of tales about Gyges were probably in circulation by the time the Greeks heard about him. At all events, we learn nothing about the historical Gyges from the extant Greek traditions other than information that Gyges was a king of Lydia and vague references to his military successes. But we know that these traditions were well known in a number of versions, the earliest of which preceded Herodotus.

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37. K. F. Smith, "The Tale of Gyges and the King of Lydia," 261–82.
38. Ibid., 280–82.

It is striking how many of the themes in this tale appear in the story of David. In Herodotus's introduction of Candaules and Gyges the incumbent king's ancestry is traced to the founder of his dynasty, while the cited ancestry of Gyges, the usurper, is limited to his father. So too, 1 Samuel traces Saul's genealogy, but David is merely the son of Jesse.[39] David, like Gyges in Plato's version, was a shepherd who came to the attention of the king and was given a position at the court. Gyges' claim to this attention came, in Plato's report, from his magical ring. One of David's talents was his skill in playing a (magical?) lyre that exorcised evil spirits, or at least had healing properties. In Nicolaus (from Xanthus) Gyges was[40]

> at that time a youth of eighteen, remarkable for his size and beauty, a good soldier, and surpassing his equals in all things, but especially in the management of arms and horses. These gifts and accomplishments soon recommended him to the king who made him one of his bodyguard (lit. spear carrier).

In 1 Sam 16:18 Saul sought a musician to play for him. David is described as

> a musician and man of valor and a soldier and clever in speaking and handsome, and YHWH is with him. (16:21)

Three verses later David was summoned by Saul, who made him his armor bearer (*nś' klym*). As the Lydian king became suspicious of Gyges and attempted to get rid of him by sending him on perilous missions, Saul did the same with David (1 Sam 18); in each case the attempt failed because the hero passed his test with flying colors.

Confirmation of Gyges' rule by the Delphic oracle appears in Nicolaus and Herodotus. Compare YHWH's oracular confirmation of David via Nathan in 2 Sam 7. The prediction of the fall of Gyges' dynasty in the fifth generation has no direct parallel that involves David (by contrast, 2 Sam 7 promises an eternal dynasty), but similar predictions by Samuel with regard to the house of Eli (1 Sam 3) and the family of Saul (1 Sam 13) appear in the biblical narrative. Nathan's oracle does not include a prediction of delayed punishment, but it does indicate that YHWH will chastise later kings from the house of David who sin. While Gyges murders the Lydian king, Dtr goes out of its way on two occasions to make David refrain emphatically from killing Saul (1 Sam 24 and 26), and he distances himself from the assassination of Ishbaal (2 Sam 4). In fact, he has both the slayer of Saul (2 Sam 1) and the assassins of Ishbaal (2 Sam 4) executed. Regicide of "YHWH's

39. B. Halpern, *David's Secret Demons,* 272.
40. Translation by Jones, *Paths to the Ancient Past,* 75.

anointed" is indeed punished, but David avoids any guilt. Dtr appears to protest too much. The repeated insistence on David's innocence may be evidence of a tradition of David's guilt that Dtr intentionally negated.

Gyges' relations with the wife of the Lydian king have no parallel in the extant narrative about David, but the implication that such a tradition may indeed have existed — that David seduced and won Saul's wife Ahinoam — has been explored above (see chap. 3).

The narrative motifs in the tale of Gyges may be based on Lydian legends, but we know them through Greek literature. How widespread were they? Herodotus and Plato appear to have heard of them independently. Did they circulate in the Persian Empire as well? If they had any influence on the final form of the story of David in the Bible, through what media, and when, might the Judaean author or editor have learned them? If indeed these motifs, like those discussed previously, were factors in the final formation of the David narrative, the late fifth century might be a reasonable suggestion for the completion of the redacted story. On the other hand, Ezek 38–39 knew of Gyges (as Gog, King of Magog) in the sixth century. If some versions of the Gyges legends, as well as his reputation, were already current in the Near East at that time, their adoption by a redactor could have been much earlier in the exilic period.

A word of caution must be added here, prompted by an article only peripherally related to our subject. In "King David, King Herod and Nicolaus of Damascus" (1998) Tal Ilan proposes that Josephus used Nicolaus's work on Herod's life to the point of dependence; Josephus's account *is* virtually that of Nicolaus.[41] Of course Josephus thought that Nicolaus, who was Herod's court historian, was far too flattering of his patron, and Josephus corrects that impression by offering more negative interpretations of Herod's motives and deeds in several instances. What emerges from this life of Herod by Josephus/Nicolaus is a set of narrative elements parallel to those in Dtr's life of David:

1. *Discrediting the previous dynasty.* The late Hasmoneans are seen as losing the kingdom to Rome through their quarrels.
2. *Promising youth and early career.* Nicolaus insisted Herod was from a Jewish family in Babylon (*Ant.* xiv.9, where Josephus says that Nicolaus was covering up the Idumaean origin of Herod's family in order to please his master). As a child Herod met Manaemus (Menahem) the Essene prophet, who predicted he would become king (*Ant.* xv.373–378). Herod was a great hunter and fighter (*War* i.429), and Luck

41. T. Ilan, "King David, King Herod and Nicolaus of Damascus," *JSQ* 5 (1998): 195–240.

(*tyche*) was with him (*War* i.430). He was appointed governor of the Galilee as a lad of fifteen (*Ant.* xiv.158). When he killed the robber Ezekias he was praised in song (*War* i.205; *Ant.* xiv.160).

3. *Exile and return.* Herod was forced to flee when the Parthians invaded and made the Hasmonean Antigonus Mattathias king; he returned to defeat them as an ally of Rome, the Jews' enemy (*War* i.248ff.; *Ant.* xiv.330ff.). During his exile he had left his family at the fortress of Masada (*War* i.367; *Ant.* xiv.352ff.).

4. *Political murders.* As king he eliminated members of the old ruling house, among them his own Hasmonean wife Mariamne and her sons. Mariamne did not esteem Herod because of her high birth (*Ant.* xv.210, 219). He executed several of his own sons for rebellion after a series of reconciliations (*War* I and *Ant.* xv, passim).

Ilan argues that Nicolaus used David as a model for his life of Herod, perhaps on the suggestion of Herod himself, who thought a comparison to David would win him support among the Jews.

If Nicolaus was using biblical material on David in his work on Herod, can he have used it also in his version of Xanthus's story of Gyges? If so, what I have suggested as evidence of late literary influence on 1–2 Samuel may be just the reverse — that is, biblical influence on Nicolaus. We would then not be reading in Nicolaus's fragment on Gyges a Roman-period copy or paraphrase of a fifth-century Greek writer repeating Lydian-Persian traditions. But Nicolaus was an established writer when Herod brought him to his court. While he knew 1–2 Samuel at some point — Josephus cites the fourth book of Nicolaus's *History* in *Ant.* i.101 where he allegedly describes the conflict (2 Sam 8) between David and Hadadezer ("Adados") from a Damascene perspective — there is no indication when the *Universal History* was compiled. Nicolaus may have written the material about Lydia and Gyges in the *History* before accepting Herod's invitation to be court intellectual, historian, advisor, and occasional advocate at Rome. In that case he would not likely have used themes from 2 Samuel in an account of a Lydian hero.

Furthermore, Ilan's contention that Nicolaus's life of Herod is not only the major source of Josephus, but that in Josephus we are actually reading Nicolaus's account, has not been fully proven. Josephus cites him by name only rarely in attributing specific details to him. There remain the possibilities (1) that Josephus himself consciously or unconsciously drew the parallels between David and Herod, which are never explicitly pointed out as parallels, and (2) that the actual career of Herod coincidentally did run parallel to

David's, and perhaps to the careers of other rulers who held their positions with the aid and approval of an external power like Rome and killed off their opponents as well as members of the previous dynasty.

I have always presented the parallel lives of David and Herod to my students as an example of the power of the press, or in this case, the historical accounts which survive, in defining someone as a hero or villain. David had the good fortune of having Dtr as his biographer; he became the ideal ruler in Jewish tradition. Herod's image as a paranoid and cruel tyrant resulted from his misfortune of having Josephus's account, rather than that of Nicolaus, survive by default as his definitive portrait.

Summary

In Israelite tradition David was seen as the second king of Judah and Israel but the real founder of a stable monarchy that included all the tribes. A large number of stories, folk tales, and legends developed around this David over a span of years that may have begun in his own lifetime or shortly thereafter, continued through the monarchical period, and ended after the Babylonian exile. The literature appears to have included poems, folktales, legends, and perhaps elements of historical accounts. In some cases we have only fragments or abbreviated references to what must have been longer narratives. By an undetermined point, probably late in the monarchy, the various literary pieces constituted a coherent account of David, or cycle of stories, which I have called the "fixed legend." This account may be seen as secular heroic literature; it shares many features with the heroic literature of other cultures. Some characters and themes in the narratives were fully developed; others were not — or at least if they were, the details have not survived. Certainly there were popular stories in the fixed legend that we know only through abbreviated references and hints at more details.

This fixed legend was the basis of Dtr's account of David in 1 Samuel–1 Kings. Dtr added very little of his characteristic pro-YHWH rhetoric and of his polemic against Canaanite gods and religious practices; but he did choose which episodes to relate in full, which to abbreviate, and which to manipulate in the interest of David's legitimacy as Saul's successor. In some instances he removed heroic stories from the narrative altogether and placed references to them at the end as an appendix of sorts. Dtr clearly regarded David as a great leader, and the dynastic oracle of 2 Sam 7 is probably his insertion, but he did not suppress "negative" material about David. I have argued that much of this material is actually negative only to an audience expecting David to conform to religious ideals of righteousness. In the component tales, in the fixed legend, and perhaps in the way even Dtr

understood the story, roguishness and ruthlessness were simply as much part of a hero's persona as cleverness and success at arms. Dtr's text became the authoritative version.

The evidence makes it probable that final reworking of story details and themes was still going on in the Persian period, with borrowings of material from Persian traditions that we know through Herodotus and other Greek writers. If the compilation of the Deuteronomic history took place primarily in the sixth century (with a possible first recension in the seventh), the addition and revision of material in its story of David may have extended into the fifth.

Chapter 7

A Fresh Look at David in the Twenty-first Century

The Young David

Scholarship at the dawn of the twenty-first century has produced new wine in old bottles in regard to David. I shall comment briefly on the latest books that deal with the issues of dating and historicity: *The Bible Unearthed: Archaeology's New Vision of Ancient Israel and the Origin of Its Sacred Tests,* by Israel Finkelstein and Neil A. Silberman,[1] and *What Did the Biblical Writers Know and When Did They Know It? What Archaeology Can Tell Us about the Reality of Ancient Israel,* by William G. Dever.[2] Then I will examine at greater length two new works on David: Steven L. McKenzie's *King David: A Biography,*[3] and *David's Secret Demons: Messiah, Murderer, Traitor, King,* by Baruch Halpern.[4] Finally, in this chapter and the next, I take the reader systematically through the story of David in Samuel–Kings from the perspective of the approach I have taken in this work, and with a running critique of McKenzie's and Halpern's analysis.

General Issues

The conflict between the minimalists and maximalists over the last two decades, and the varying degrees of belief and skepticism that characterize intermediate positions, are well known to the scholarly community and to interested laypersons. But the full impact of contemporary archaeological, historical, and textual studies has reached the general public only recently. Within the last few years newspaper and magazine articles in Israel and the United States have "exposed" the fact that the scholarly community does not

1. New York: Free Press, 2001.
2. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001.
3. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.
4. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001.

believe in the historicity of the patriarchs, the exodus, and Joshua's conquest, and now the lives of Saul, David, and Solomon and the very existence of the united monarchy have been called into question. *The Bible Unearthed* — a clever pun — is a more sober, if popular, exposition of the issues by an archaeologist and a historian. Finkelstein and Silberman regard the Deuteronomic history as a product of Josiah's reign in the seventh century. Dtr presented Josiah as a new David who was restoring the glory of the golden age, and through a religious reform was removing the cultic sins of Israel that had begun with Solomon and were responsible for the decline of the kingdom.[5] Dtr's message was, "There is still a way to regain the glory of the past."[6] As literature, the accounts of David and Solomon in Samuel–Kings are characterized as follows: "The glorious epic of the united monarchy was — like the stories of the patriarchs and the sagas of the Exodus and conquest — a brilliant composition that wove together ancient heroic tales and legends into a coherent and persuasive prophecy for the people of Israel in the seventh century B.C.E."[7]

Finkelstein's reading of the archaeological data in tenth-century Canaan/Israel renders the biblical version of events impossible. The central highlands reveal no trace of written documents or inscriptions, a unified culture, or a centralized state. While the area north of Jerusalem was fairly densely settled, the southern section of the highlands was sparsely populated. His population estimates are forty-five thousand in the entire central highlands, but 90 percent of those people lived in the north. Jerusalem, Hebron, and some twenty villages in Judah would have housed no more than about five thousand people, including pastoralists. There are no remains of monumental buildings in Jerusalem, and the greater agricultural development would be only in the north. Yet the ninth-century Tel Dan inscription makes David's existence certain, and there is no reason to doubt Solomon's.[8] "Archaeologically we can say no more about David and Solomon except that they existed — and that their legend endured."[9] The Judahites' enduring memory and veneration of David and Solomon is the main evidence for some kind of (small) territorial state in the highlands, but the description of Samuel–Kings reflects the realities of the seventh century, not the tenth; for example, Arabian trade, the Aqaba fleet, and Greek (cf. Cerethite and Pelethite) mercenaries in Near Eastern armies. David's completion of the conquest of the

5. Finkelstein and Silberman, *The Bible Unearthed,* 143–44.
6. Ibid., 144.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid., 130–43.
9. Ibid., 143.

promised land is an expression of theological hopes, not history.[10] Finkelstein's lower dating of the allegedly "Solomonic" reconstruction of Hazor, Megiddo, and Gezer to the ninth century is of more significance to the reign of Solomon and the idea of a united monarchy than to the career of David, which is our immediate concern.[11]

Dever's book is a defense of the more conservative consensus that archaeologists and historians had reached with regard to the era of David. It contains an undisguised polemic against the minimalists[12] — he also calls them revisionists — with whom he agrees about the nonhistoricity of the patriarchs and the exodus, but whom he sharply criticizes as misinterpreting the archaeological data with regard to the united monarchy. There is not much new that he had not written in previous articles (see above chap. 2, note 57), but in *What Did the Biblical Writers Know?* he has presented his case at length in a manner accessible to the general public.

The Deuteronomic history from Deuteronomy through 2 Kings, whose core was produced in the period of Josiah, was written as a national epic and edited with a theological agenda; it cannot be taken at face value.

> Indeed, most of the biblical narrative falls without question into this category, consisting as it does of miraculous tales, legends, folktales, sagas, myth, and the like. But even many passages in Joshua–Kings that purport to be straightforward historical accounts must be regarded with some suspicion, because the basic narrative is overlaid with many elements that will appear to most modern readers not only as embellishments, but as fanciful or even totally fantastic. It is for that reason that many biblical scholars of the mainstream — not only radicals like the revisionists — regard the Hebrew Bible as basically "rationalized myth," "fictionalized history," "historicized fiction," "story," or simply "pious fiction."[13]

Dever prefers "theocratic history."[14] I have quoted this passage in full because it is such a strong pronouncement. It is followed, however, by the expected "Yes, but . . . " statement that has characterized Dever's intermediary position between the maximalists and the minimalists. Dever calls it "conservative . . . moderate, practical, sensible, middle-of-the-road."[15] Many of the sources that underlie the biblical account, and consequently, the basic

10. Ibid., 143–44.
11. Ibid., 130ff.
12. Dever, *What Did the Biblical Writers Know?, passim,* esp. chap. 6.
13. Ibid., 271.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid., 272.

narrative framework, have historical value. "Convergences" between the text and physical realities uncovered by archaeology render the basic historicity of the narrative framework likely.[16] For the united monarchy Dever points to parallels in Near Eastern temple architecture with the biblical description of Solomon's temple; parallels in cultic art, for example, *cherubim;* and parallels in the description of Solomon's administrative districts in 1 Kgs 4 and settlement patterns discovered by archaeologists. He refutes Finkelstein's lower dating of Megiddo, Hazor, and Gezer and restores the refurbishing of these cities to the Solomonic period. Dever's estimate of the Israelite population in the tenth century is higher than Finkelstein's, about one hundred thousand; even if it were smaller and the residents of the few villages in the immediate vicinity of Jerusalem numbered only twenty-two hundred, he says, there was still a sufficient population base for a national state.[17]

Another statement Dever makes with regard to our subject, however, must enrage the typical minimalist, but it may also disturb nonminimalists who are inclined to be more skeptical. "I would also note that however folkloric the stories of Saul's and David's amours, wars, misadventures, and heroic deeds may seem to be (and probably are), they nevertheless have the *ring of truth* [my italics] about them in many regards."[18] These "regards" include the wars with the Philistines and the ambivalence in early Israel toward kingship and dynastic succession. They are "credible" and fit the archaeological data.

Invoking "the ring of truth" makes me nervous. It characterizes any good historical novel and is what makes heroic tales compelling, but in historical studies it cannot take us beyond plausibility to actual historicity. There may have been military confrontations between Israelites and Philistines, so tenth-century destruction layers might indicate — since *someone* must have been responsible for the destruction — but every textual detail we have about them, coming from a tendentious account written almost four hundred years later which perhaps drew on earlier sources of a questionable nature, is probably fictional. I do not dispute Dever's contention that "there is nothing inherently improbable in the main outline of the biblical story,"[19] especially if by "improbable" he means "implausible." But I would question what constitutes the main outline in light of Dever's recognition that the details are folkloristic. To say that David and a Davidic era existed, a position with which I can agree, is one thing. But Dever goes on

16. Ibid., see esp. chap. 4.
17. Ibid., 127.
18. Ibid., 268.
19. Ibid.

to attack the minimalists' remark that the era of David is no more historical than the tales of King Arthur. He argues that behind the Deuteronomistic embellishments we can find actual conditions at the time of the described events and "the main elements of the story" — I take that to mean narrative details — because they derive from early sources. Third- or second-century writers (so the more radical minimalists) who lived long after there was an Israelite kingship, could not "have made up such complex stories out of whole cloth."[20]

But (1) most nonminimalist scholars would place at least one recension of Dtr as early as the seventh century, and writers of the late seventh through fifth century (Dtr) experienced Israelite, Babylonian, or Persian monarchical life; (2) stories, legends, and folktales do indeed contain fictional material, whether they arise close in time to the "events" or later as the legendary cycles develop; (3) if the early sources of Dtr are of such nonhistoriographical genres, they are minimally useful for reconstructing even the "main" narrative; and (4) for the sake of argument, there *was* an era of King Arthur (even if its namesake was not a king) that was distorted beyond recognition by the developing Arthurian tradition of legends, folktales, and self-professed historical works. Convergences between the text and archaeological evidence may reveal basic information about socioeconomic conditions, but it is safer to be more skeptical about even the main outline of events and the role of individuals.

Biography

P. Kyle McCarter's interpretation of the story of David in 1–2 Samuel as a royal apology in response to accusations against him (see above, chap. 5) has inspired new variations on this theme by Steven McKenzie and Baruch Halpern. At the beginning of *King David: A Biography* McKenzie acknowledges the influence of his teachers:[21] McCarter, whose royal apology theory he has adopted and on whose Anchor Bible commentaries on 1 and 2 Samuel he depends; Dever, whose archaeological studies set the background for the period of David and whose somewhat positive attitude toward the sources (which we have just described) he accepts; and Van Seters, whose negative assessment of the historical value of the David narrative he rejects, but whose explanation of the Bathsheba episode helps to save his own theory that the rest of the text is David's apology. McKenzie is confident about his

20. Ibid., 268–69.
21. McKenzie, *King David*, viii.

search for the historical David: "My purpose is not simply to retell the biblical story but to recount the events and details of David's life to the extent that they can be surmised from the available sources. This includes matters such as his real character and personality, physical appearance, deeds and accomplishments, and true motives and ambitions."[22]

McKenzie is careful throughout to remind readers that his historical reconstruction is hypothetical, is based on drawing historical information from the biblical text, and may go no farther than the Bible's own conception of David. But it is "a useful enterprise even if we were to determine that David was not a historical person." The result is "a plausible tale."[23] Certainly McKenzie does his best to demonstrate that his plausible tale is the one most likely to make sense of the biblical text. But that involves a second hypothetical that is not in itself a historical reconstruction but a literary-critical decision concerning the nature of the text — about which McKenzie appears fairly certain — that is, that its genre is political apology. All follows from that interpretation of the text: If it is apologetic literature that attempts to disguise events, then the events must be real; otherwise why write an apology? The logic takes us beyond plausibility to a claim of historicity. McKenzie admits controversy about the date of the apology — Davidic, Solomonic, or later — but writes that

> whatever their date of writing, they seem to contain genuine historical information about David. It is hard to believe that they are pure fiction. Who would invent such allegations against David just to try to explain them away? Moreover, the events they relate have the "ring" of authenticity. . . . In short, the story in the Deuteronomistic history . . . is as close to the historical David as we can get. It appears to contain genuine historical information about him . . . clothed in literary and apologetic garb.[24]

McKenzie presents David as an assassin who murdered his way to the top and then had to defend his reputation against accusations regarding his personal and political misdeeds. The core text of 1–2 Samuel is the apology generated by David's own propagandists or those employed by a later member of the dynasty, who justified his vocations of outlaw and Philistine mercenary, denied that he had been trying to undermine and plot against Saul from the beginning, and distanced their master from involvement in the deaths of Nabal, Saul and his progeny, Abner, Ishbaal, Uriah, Amnon, and

22. Ibid., 5f.
23. Ibid., 24f., 186.
24. Ibid., 35f.

Absalom.[25] The accusations must have been historical, argues McKenzie, for no propagandist would invent them just to explain them away.[26] And the apology worked; at least it was convincing to Dtr, who used it as the official narrative about David and enhanced it.[27] But where there's smoke, there's fire. To reconstruct David's life McKenzie assumes that most of the accusations were true. His biography of David — or plausible tale — begins with the protagonist as a musician and military commander, who then goes on to become king and create a small empire by removing everybody in his way.[28] What doesn't fit the pattern or purpose of the apology and thus poses a problem is the adulterous affair with Bathsheba and the murder of Uriah. The solution comes from Van Seters: the Bathsheba story is a late, post-Dtr addition to the text.[29]

Halpern, whose *David's Secret Demons* appeared just months after McKenzie's book, worked out a similar thesis independently. Here, too, the apologetic nature of the text implies that there were accusations against David, which are to be taken seriously; he is guilty on almost all counts. The apology offers a limited profile of David, not a real biography,[30] and that profile is of David as a serial killer.[31] But Halpern is more skeptical about the historical value of various parts of the narrative than is McKenzie. Up to the death of Saul we have a mixture of two sources, called A and B, one sometimes sympathetic toward Saul, the other never.[32] Much of this material, especially the description of David's early career — the main narrative, not only some details — is legend or propaganda. In reality David had never been associated with Saul, his family, or his court. The first real historical reference to David is his role as a mercenary for Achish of Gath.[33]

The narrative of the period after Saul's death, however, follows a single source whose "level of political reportage rises to a height paralleled in antiquity only by Thucydides," with family and personal details that remind one of Herodotus.[34] Its theme is that David's lawlessness begot lawlessness in his family.[35] Punishment for his sins was by divine intervention, but it

25. Ibid., 12–13 and passim.
26. Ibid., 186.
27. Ibid., 189.
28. Ibid., 188.
29. Ibid., 154ff. and above, chap. 2. Van Seters argued that the entire Succession History was a post-Dtr document that was anti-David.
30. Halpern, *David's Secret Demons*, 14.
31. Ibid., chap. 4.
32. Ibid., 14ff.
33. Ibid., 287f.
34. Ibid., 27.
35. Ibid., 41.

came in the course of events and was carried out through human agency.[36] The account of David's wars in 2 Sam 8 is an insertion into the narrative of a text taken from an independent source; it is the anchor for the historicity of David's accomplishments. This list of victories and booty taken appears to have been based on a display inscription from David's reign whose recorded events, though exaggerated, are a summary of his military-political successes and territorial gains.[37] All of this material was collected and arranged long before Dtr. Halpern argues that the linguistic evidence points to the eighth century or earlier, and the reflected memories of the tenth century indicate a date for 2 Samuel no later than the ninth century.[38]

In Halpern's view David rose to power with Philistine assistance and a series of assassinations, and he held it through more killings, including the extermination of Saul's heirs. Resentment for the latter deed, in fact, was a primary motive in the rebellions against David and for the necessity of a royal apology.

Once again, the Bathsheba story seems out of place in a such an apology. On the contrary — in a tortuous argument to be examined below, Halpern keeps the Bathsheba episode in the original text. He attributes the apology not to David but to Solomon, who needed not only to present David as a legitimate king instead of a usurper but also to justify his own seizure of the throne. Solomon was in reality the son of Uriah, and not from the true line of David, a fact that had to be suppressed for his claim to dynastic succession. To pass with certainty as David's offspring, Solomon falsely professed that Uriah was killed on David's orders — a frame-up — and that Bathsheba's first postadultery child died. Solomon, born later, after it was possible for Uriah to have been his father, thus must be David's son. This is the one alleged crime, says Halpern, of which David was innocent. As an intentional piece of Solomonic propaganda the Bathsheba episode is regarded as part of the original apologetic text.[39]

Both McKenzie and Halpern thus interpret the life of David in Dtr's history as taken from a systematic apologetic work contemporary with David or Solomon. If there is apology there must have been something potentially damaging that required denial or "spin." The truth is to be found in the acts that are repeatedly denied and in less complimentary versions of what is admitted. As Halpern puts it, "We know that Samuel is accurate because it

36. Ibid., 48.
37. Ibid., chaps. 5–6; previously argued by Halpern in his 1996 article, "The Construction of the Davidic State," discussed above in chap. 2.
38. Halpern, *David's Secret Demons*, chap. 3.
39. Ibid., 94ff., 401ff.

is nothing but lies."[40] What emerges is considered real history — the events and the people — by both McKenzie and Halpern.

In my work on the Samaritan sectarian Dositheus[41] I found that virtually all references to him were from his enemies or opponents — mainstream Samaritans or Christians. Two of these sources satirize Dositheus's death, insisting his body was eaten by dogs or by worms and flies. It was clear that they were denying a belief held by his followers that he never died but was still alive somewhere. We thus infer the Dositheans' belief from the denial of their opponents. But the inference demonstrates existence of the belief, not the historical fact that Dositheus never died. Propaganda may combat a story or a rumor that something happened as well as denying that something happened in actuality, and it can invent stories, too. Plato *(Republic* II.376Eff. and III.390Eff.) advocated the censorship of fables, myths, and epic poetry because they often give impressionable minds the wrong idea about gods and heroes, picturing them as quarreling with friends and relatives and not acting as paragons of virtue. Gods must not be seen as sources of evil; young people should not, for example, hear Aeschylus's line (Fragment 160),

> God plants a fault in mortals / When he would ruin some house utterly.

(Compare, by the way, YHWH's evil spirit cast upon Saul.) Tales involving negative traits and deeds of heroes, especially those with some divine ancestry, cannot be true: for example, Achilles could not be mean, greedy, and contemptuous, or Theseus could not have been a rapist (II.380A). Plato was concerned here not with events but with the way they were described in the Greek literary tradition. It was the stories that required censoring.

No doubt the account of David usually puts him in the best light. Written by his or Solomon's propagandists, the apology would naturally focus on his deeds, a negative perception of which might have been fresh in people's memory and thus bear political consequences. So McCarter, McKenzie, and Halpern. But why can the apologist not be instead a later writer/redactor such as Dtr, defending the founder of the glorious dynasty to which Josiah belonged and after whom he modeled Josiah? The writer would be dealing not necessarily with historical records of private deeds and conversations from four hundred to five hundred years before, but with stories and legends about David that had become parts of a developing popular tradition.

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40. Ibid., 100.

41. S. Isser, *The Dositheans: A Samaritan Sect in Late Antiquity* (Studies in Judaism in Late Antiquity 17; Leiden: Brill, 1976).

Many of these stories would have portrayed David as a clever rogue and sometimes amoral romantic hero, and these had to be selected and edited to create the biography of a near perfect dynastic founder — whose only sin was the matter of Uriah (so stated in 1 Kgs 15:5) — chosen by YHWH to be king, opportunistic, perhaps, but not a deceitful and cruel usurper. What we get back to through analyzing the apology, in this case, are the earlier versions of the stories that Dtr found in the popular literature, not the historical events themselves or real historiographical material about them. The stories contain private and intimate details and conversations characteristic of popular poems and prose accounts, but hardly the type of literature found in royal annals and stelae or issued by official propagandists about living or recently departed kings. They sound more like Herodotus's tales of harem conspiracies than Darius's apologetic Behistun inscription.

As we survey the various episodes of the life of David, I comment on the approaches of McKenzie and Halpern, who see actual historical events behind the narrative, in contrast to my interpretation, which posits a tradition of popular heroic literature underlying the present text. The remainder of this chapter deals with the literature about David's rise until the death of Saul. The period of David's kingship is taken up in the following chapter.

Samuel

For McCarter most of the material on Samuel is part of an eighth-century prophetic supplement that has revised the narrative from a perspective that kingship depends on prophecy. The career of Samuel, including his role in the selection of Saul and then opposition to him, and the anointment of David, is an addition from this supplement, with very little reworking by Dtr. It is not clear whether this supplement used earlier traditions or made up the narrative elements. I have argued above (chap. 3) that the presence of an oracular figure who wields the divine spirit is not out of place in an account of the foundation of kingship, either in an early legend or in a later stage of the folk tradition's growth. The polemical aspects of the Samuel material can easily be Deuteronomic overlays instead of the contributions of a prophetic supplement.

The pre-Dtr existence of Samuel — the stories, not necessarily the historical figure — is best indicated by the notable passage (1 Sam 9:9) in which he is described as a seer, only to have the text explain that this is what prophets used to be called. His casting of the spirit upon Saul and his policemen so that they prophesy (i.e., they are rendered helpless; 1 Sam 19), and his appearance as a ghost in 1 Sam 28 are more characteristic of folklore than of an invented tendentious account. True, in the framework of the present text, even in these unusual episodes, Samuel is employed by Dtr for the purpose

of anti-Saul and pro-David rhetoric. In other passages Samuel's prophecy is used to warn against the dangers of monarchy and to anticipate and justify the replacement of the Elide priesthood by the Zadokite. But all of these items appear to be built on an underlying tale or legend of a mysterious and powerful seer at a time when the roles of priest and prophet were not clearly separated. That such venerated figures existed, at least in the popular tradition, is shown by the Deir Alla inscription, which demonstrates that the "seer" Balaam (cf. Num 22–24) was well known in the larger region of Canaan.

The birth of Samuel (1 Sam 1) follows a typical biblical literary pattern: divine intervention for a previously barren favorite wife. He grows up as a Nazirite and priest-in-training, and experiences a nocturnal call which inaugurates his career as a prophet (1 Sam 3).

It is an already old argument that in one of Dtr's more barefaced thefts, the author or redactor of this material has taken details from the story of Saul and applied them artificially to Samuel. The name "Samuel," of course, means "name of God" or "name of El," not what the biblical etymology claims, that is, "the one requested" by his grateful mother Hannah (1 Sam 1:27f.). "The one requested" (*ša'ul*) is Saul's name. (In 8:10 the people request a king, and in 12:13 and 17 the "requested" one is Saul. Perhaps these phrases are drawn from an old etymological tradition.)

We should be alert for other possible usurpations of details, but caution must be exercised. Samuel's status as a Nazirite is suspicious because it plays no further role in the narrative. In Judg 13–16 Samson, another miracle child of a barren mother by divine intervention, is a Nazirite whose restrictions somehow give him great strength. That kind of special dedication may be characteristic of a great warrior and may be more appropriate for a future king than a prophet.[42] But that is an arbitrary supposition. The Nazirite status of a heroic figure could also have been applicable to a future seer and priest destined to become a national leader and kingmaker. It is noteworthy that we have no account, miraculous or otherwise, of Saul's birth, or David's for that matter. Saul's father Kish and his prior ancestry is introduced in 1 Sam 9:1 with the same literary formula as is Samuel's father Elkanah and ancestry in 1:1, but Saul is already a mature young man at this point. While the etymology of the name has clearly been transferred to Samuel, it is less convincing that the Nazirite theme in the birth legend has been as well.

Marc Brettler's detailed analysis of 1 Sam 1–2 traces its literary development from a base text through three separate additions including Dtr.[43] The

42. McCarter, *I Samuel*, 65.
43. M. Brettler, "The Composition of 1 Samuel 1–2," *JBL* 116 (1997): 600–612.

base text, consisting of the introduction of Elkanah and his wives and Hannah's barrenness, her oath and confrontation with Eli (minus her prayer), Samuel's service to YHWH, and his auditory experience, is pre-Dtr; it already contained the name etymology and the birth narrative transferred from Saul to Samuel at an early stage. The additions involve the cultic and sexual sins of Eli's sons, a Deuteronomistic prophecy-fulfillment pattern, vocabulary links to the dynastic oracle of 2 Sam 7, and the implied legitimacy of the Zadokite priesthood.

The items Brettler flagged as additions are the contributions of parties with special interests. The base text appears to be part of an old tradition which had already undergone some alteration through the probably intentional confusion of birth narratives. The dates of the original and the alteration cannot be determined other than that they precede Dtr. Brettler has given us an example not only of a pre-Dtr tradition but also of one that shows signs of secondary development over time. The material is obviously legendary.

The Ark Narrative, Part 1 (1 Sam 4–7:1)

The story of the captured ark serves many purposes in the larger narrative. It provides punishment for Eli's corrupt sons and helps to fulfill Samuel's prophecy about the demise of the Elide house by killing off Eli along with his children. That, in turn, allows Samuel to succeed to the leadership of Israel. The Elide failure against the Philistines — under their leadership YHWH would not aid Israel in battle — can then be contrasted with Samuel's success with YHWH's help in 7:5–14. The story also explains YHWH's apparent weakness in battle as an intentional act of punishment for Elide sins, and goes on to demonstrate YHWH's power over foreign gods and their worshipers. Finally, it explains what the ark was doing in the place from which David later took it to Jerusalem.

The theme of the basic story is the capture and return of gods or something that represents them. In this case YHWH, the god of the losers, engineers his own return by making life miserable for the captors (and their gods), who must acknowledge YHWH's power. Despite the presence of these thematic and didactic elements, some have considered the story a reflection of historical events.[44] If so, its date must be before David's victories over the Philistines in which he avenged the past humiliation and captured *their* gods (2 Sam 5). Originally an independent account, it has been worked into the narrative of Samuel.

44. See discussion in McCarter, *I Samuel,* 24–27. He cites especially P. Miller and J. Roberts, *The Hand of the Lord: A Reassessment of the "Ark Narrative" of 1 Samuel* (Johns Hopkins Near Eastern Studies; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977).

Let us look briefly at the details. In the opening battle at Ebenezer the Philistines killed four thousand Israelites (4:1–2), an exaggerated figure. Then the ark of the covenant of YHWH of Hosts Who Sits upon the Cherubim (an anachronistic title?) is brought to the front from Shiloh. "Woe to us," cry the terrified Philistines. "Who will save us from these mighty gods?" (4:3–9). The Philistines rally, slay thirty thousand Israelites (even if a "thousand," or *elep,* represents a much smaller unit, this is a rather large number), and capture the ark (4:10–11). In a dramatic scene with a stylized arrival of a messenger with bad tidings (cf. 2 Sam 1:3–4), Eli hears of the tragedy and falls over dead. Dtr inserts a notice that Eli had judged Israel forty years (4:12–18), the standard round number, reminiscent of the formulas in Judges. This section of the story ends with an etymological etiology for the name of Eli's grandson, Ichabod (i.e., "no honor"; 4:19–22).

In 1 Sam 5 the Philistines place the ark in the temple of Dagon in Ashdod as a trophy, but when they awake the next morning the statue of Dagon has been smashed and the city's residents smitten with hemorrhoids (and a plague of mice according to LXX). They remove the ark and take it elsewhere, but the same scene plays out in Gath and Ekron. Not only is this a fanciful story, but it is apparently based on another etiological tale: 5:5 explains that because Dagon's broken head and hands fell upon the threshold of the temple at Ashdod, the Philistine priests do not step upon the threshold "until this day."[45] The chapter ends with the suffering at Ekron; "The outcry of the city went up to the sky" (5:12, cf. Exod 2:23, the outcry of the Israelite slaves in Egypt).

The return of the ark in 1 Sam 6 is complex. Priests and diviners are consulted. Five golden hemorrhoids and five golden mice are to be sent with it to appease YHWH. The number five — because the plague has affected all five *seranim* of the Philistines (6:4) — indicates that in addition to the three Philistine cities named in chapter 5, the original story repeated the temple-and-hemorrhoids routine in Gaza and Ashkelon as well, a fact that is also attested further on in 6:17. The ark is placed on a cart to be drawn in any random direction by cows that never previously bore a yoke. They take it straight to Beth Shemesh, in "his" (i.e., YHWH's) territory. There, in the field of Joshua, the cart is dismantled, the cows sacrificed, and the chest with the golden objects placed on a large rock by Levites (an anachronism?). That stone is there to be seen until this day (6:18; another etiology). Despite the sacrifices offered by the pious men of Beth Shemesh, YHWH smote seventy-five (an inserted gloss says fifty thousand) of them because they saw

45. Miller and Roberts see in the imagery of the broken head and especially hands the signs of an underlying story of conflict between the gods.

the ark (!). Consequently, as we move on to 1 Sam 7, the inhabitants of Beth Shemesh arrange to have the ark taken off their hands by the people of Kiryat Yearim. There it is tended by Abinadab and his son Eleazar "on the hill" (another "historic" site?).

This is no historical account with theological overlays and elaborated details. Neither is it an account which combines just a small number of major themes, as, for example, suggested by David Damrosch, *The Narrative Covenant: Transformations of Genre in the Growth of Biblical Literature* (1987).[46] He describes it as "an ambitious mingling of genres . . . not so much blended as juxtaposed." But these genres number only two: "a historicized mythic-epic encounter between Yahweh and Dagon" and "a family saga of Eli and his sons." Damrosch explains how the two forms supplement each other, but he misses the numerous other elements. The Ark Narrative has a series of possibly independent tales that includes adventure, dialogue, thematic scenes, repetition of actions, humor, exaggeration of numbers and emotions, miraculous divine intervention, a redactional comment, two possible anachronisms, and three, perhaps four, etiological references. The amusing tale of the ark in Philistia alone can stand on its own, but it has been integrated with the story of the Elides and with an explanation of its new location at Kiryat Yearim. There is so much here that is of folkloric or legendary origin that to ascribe historical value to even its basic plot line is wishful thinking. Dtr has imposed his theological and political ideas not on history but on a narrative cobbled together from several nonhistoriographical sources, a good example of what Van Seters has likened to an arrangement of Herodotean *logoi*.

Samuel and the Israelite Demand for a King (1 Sam 7:3–8:22)

1 Sam 8 begins the lengthy narrative of the birth of monarchy in Israel. Historians and source critics have long posited at least two sources, if not three, in this material, one opposed to the institution of the monarchy and the other in favor of it. Alternately, the "opposition" view may be anti-Saul and/or pro-David rather than antimonarchical. Those who tend to ascribe historiographical value to the text also see an accurate reflection of the hesitation and ambivalence felt by the Israelites, reluctant to abandon their system of autonomous tribes for the potential problems associated with a centralized government. Samuel's warning about what kings do is understood as representing the hesitant position. From another perspective, in the

46. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987, 182–83.

"negative" material Samuel's opposition to kingship and his running criticism of Saul might be characterized as a struggle between church and state or, on a personal level, as the portrait, whether historical or literary, of a leader unwilling to relinquish power to another.

First Samuel 7:2ff. serves as an introduction. While the ark rests in Kiryat Yearim for twenty years, Samuel conducts a successful religious reform: the people put aside their devotion to Baal and Astarte and worship YHWH alone. In 1 Sam 7:5ff. Samuel's prayer and sacrifice induce YHWH to win a military victory for Israel near Mizpah through mighty thunder which discomfits the Philistines. He erects a stone monument he names Ebenezer to commemorate the victory. Towns captured by the Philistines are returned to Israel. There is peace with the local populations. Samuel judged Israel successfully (repeated several times), riding circuit to Bethel, Gilgal, and Mizpah from his home in Ramah. But in 1 Sam 8, seeing that Samuel is aging and that his sons are corrupt, the elders of Israel ask Samuel to establish a king to judge them "like all the other nations" (8:5) and to fight their wars (8:20). YHWH assures him that it is himself, not Samuel, that the people are rejecting, citing their previous cultic sins. Samuel is instructed to select a king, but not before he delivers a speech about the hazards of kingship (*mišpat hamelek*), which can turn tyrannical.

This entire text may indeed be from a negative source, but it could also be Dtr's invention. The ark's twenty-year stay in Kiryat Yearim (7:2) merely anticipates David's later association with it in 2 Sam 6. In fact, the ark is never mentioned again until then. Neither Samuel nor Saul nor any of the Israelites or their priests who are happy with their local shrines show any concern about it. Obviously, the Ark Narrative of the previous chapters was an independent tradition. Samuel's Deuteronomic-like reform (7:2–4) adds to his credentials. But it is noteworthy that when Samuel is assured that Israel's request for a king is a rejection not of the prophet but of YHWH (8:7ff.), Israel's history of cultic sin since the exodus (à la Dtr) is invoked; the recent reform is ignored completely.

The monument called Ebenezer (7:12–13) commemorates YHWH's aid to Israel's soldiers, but no mention is made of Ebenezer as the site of the ignominious battle in which the ark was captured. The text does not say explicitly that the new victory avenges the old loss. The victory at Mizpah through divine intervention, in fact, with its reference to Ebenezer, seems to *replace* the previous battle, which was part of the independent Ark Narrative, with one that had a more favorable result. The puzzling Ebenezer etiology — here not even referring to the place but to YHWH's "help" — adds to the artificiality of the story. The description of Samuel as a successful judge at the end of the chapter brings us back to the Deuteronomic language of Judges.

First Samuel 8 continues the negative account. The corruption of Samuel's sons — up till now we never knew he had a family — is lifted from the parallel description of Eli's sons. The *mišpat hamelek* smacks of Deuteronomic language (cf. Deut 17:14–17). The entire section of 7:2–8:17 may belong to Dtr in his role as author, except for the tale of the victory-by-thunder which he incorporated in his role of compiler, arranger, and editor. That passage may have been an earlier legend about Samuel the Seer's powers, or an old etiological story based on a monument. Given the Philistine hegemony over parts of Israel that we see subsequently, it certainly does not appear to be a reflection of history.

As for the people's demand for a king, Halpern comments that the account of Saul's selection is the only Near Eastern text in which the introduction of kingship in a society is the product of a human political decision. I would point out that there is a parallel in Herodotus's description of the beginning of kingship (Deioces') in Media. While Herodotus was a Greek author, his source for this story was almost certainly an eastern informant who related a Persian tradition.[47]

Saul Becomes King (1 Sam 9–12)

The first of the "positive" (promonarchy or pro-Saul) material is found in 9:1–10:16. Here Saul is introduced as a handsome young man from Gibeah in Benjamin. He goes off to seek his father's lost asses and finds the seer Samuel at a town in the land of Zuph. YHWH had forewarned Samuel about Saul's coming and instructed him to anoint him *nagid* of Israel, to save his people from the Philistines, for YHWH had heard Israel's cry. After a sacrifice at the local high place, a meal, and a night's sleep, Samuel anoints Saul and gives him specific directions about what he would encounter on the way home and how he should respond. These things came to pass, including an episode in which Saul joins a band of prophets in their frenzy, as the spirit of God comes upon him, a sign of divine favor. When he reaches home he keeps silent about his anointment.

Saul's introduction (9:1–2) includes his place of origin and ancestry; structurally it is the same as Samuel's in 1 Sam 1 — the introduction of a hero. After passing through several regions, he arrives at Zuph in the mountains of Ephraim, a place connected with Samuel's family (his father was a Zuphite, 1:1) and otherwise unmentioned. It was an insignificant place for selecting a king, but there was a high place there and Samuel was officiating. YHWH initiates the selection of Saul, having "opened Samuel's ear" the day before Saul's arrival (9:15). The reason a king is required is more specific

47. Halpern, *David's Secret Demons,* 18; Herodotus I.96–101 (see above, chap. 6).

than in 1 Sam 8; he is needed to deliver Israel from the Philistine threat (9:16). The story proceeds slowly with much seemingly insignificant detail about finding Samuel, being greeted, the sacrifice and meal, the overnight stay, and the exotic directions Samuel gives Saul. The etiology of a saying, "Is Saul also one of those prophets?" is also included. But all is kept secret until the designated hero will reveal himself. It is wonderful storytelling. An interesting analysis of the text by Bruce Birch posits an old folk tale and etiology of a saying into which has been inserted the anointment story in the form of a prophetic call narrative: divine announcement, humble objection by the designee (I am from a small family, 9:21), the commission, the sign, and divine reassurance.[48] The folkloristic elements include the formulistic introduction, the ideal description of Saul, the nameless city, the special meal, the fulfillment of signs, and the atmosphere of wonders.

In 10:17–27 we return to the "negative" account. Samuel conducts a lottery at Mizpah in which the tribe and family of Saul are chosen, and then Saul himself, bashfully hiding among the equipment. He is impressively tall. Samuel declares that YHWH has chosen him and that "there is none like him among the people" (10:24). On the surface this sounds like another positive story featuring YHWH's choice, for the casting of lots reveals the divine will, and Samuel's declaration of Saul's uniqueness. Perhaps there was such an early story. Halpern interprets the lottery as a positive divine oracle.[49] Birch sees 10:17–27 as a combination of two stories of divine selection, one by lots and one by an oracle.[50] But our text has made it less than positive. Samuel begins by reminding the people that their demand for a king amounts to a rejection of their god (10:19); implies that the lottery expresses YHWH's choice, not his own; and ends with another reading of the *mišpat hamelek* (here *mišpat hamelukah,* 10:25) as a warning. Finally, we are told that while Saul was attended at Gibeah by some brave followers, others refused to pay him respect.

First Samuel 11 has Saul emerge as a public figure. The spirit of God comes upon him and in the manner of the judges he responds to an attack on Jabesh Gilead by Nahash the Ammonite, succeeds in bringing all the tribes together in a common military effort, and wins a great victory. Subsequently the monarchy is inaugurated at Gilgal and the people declare Saul king. There are no folk tale elements in the account of the battle; the narrative is heroic, but in the manner of Dtr in Judges. Saul's deeds are praiseworthy. The story may stand on its own as a separate source on the inauguration of

48. Birch, "The Development of the Tradition," 55–68.

49. Halpern, *David's Secret Demons,* 16.

50. B. Birch, *The Rise of the Israelite Monarchy: The Growth and Development of 1 Samuel 7–15* (SBL Dissertation Series 27; Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1976), 42–53.

Saul (so, e.g., McKenzie[51]) or it can be seen as a continuation either of the Mizpah lottery in 10:17–27 (so Halpern, for whom the lottery is a favorable oracle) or of the folk tale of 9–10:16, which also had the spirit of YHWH come upon Saul. Both of those stories ended with Saul at home in Gibeah, where he is at the start of the Ammonite war. The latter is probably the least likely alternative, since it would involve a switch in genres from folk tale to a more realistic account.

Samuel's call for the people to go to Gilgal, where he sometimes acted as judge according to 1 Sam 7:16, *neḥadeš šam hamelukah* (11:14), is usually translated, "Let us renew the kingdom there," thus indicating a previous selection of Saul. But this *pi'el* form of the verb from a root meaning "new" is not always indicative of a renewed action. It does have that sense in six of the eight other biblical occurrences (Isa 61:4; 2 Chr 15:8; 24:4, 12; Lam 5:21; Job 10:17), all late texts. Twice in Psalms (51:12 and 104:30), however, the verb is in parallel with words from the root *br'*, "to create." Samuel may be calling upon the people to establish or inaugurate Saul as king for the first time. That would be appropriate if 1 Sam 11 were an independent source on the foundation of the kingdom.

The closing punctuation mark, as it were, in the account of Saul's rise to kingship is Samuel's farewell speech in 1 Sam 12. Like the stereotypical Jewish mother whose manner is to make her children feel perpetually guilty, he tells the people that against his better judgment he has fulfilled their desires and established a king. Samuel himself, and he makes the audience acknowledge it, has been a virtual saint as their leader. He recites all the things YHWH has done for Israel from the time of Jacob to the present and notes the series of leaders, including himself, who have served Israel well. But the Nahash incident made them demand a king while YHWH was their king. Well, now they have a king. If they obey YHWH all will go well, but if they and their king do not, YHWH's hand will be upon them. To show that he still has power and must be reckoned with he calls upon YHWH and produces a frightening thunderstorm. But do not fear, he tells the people, even though you did all this evil, I will still be here to pray for you and show you the right way. But if you do more evil . . . well, I told you so, you and your king will perish.

The speech is classic Dtr in its polemic and anticipates the tug of war between Samuel and Saul that is to come. Nevertheless, the creativity of the writer is unusual. While he describes Samuel as remaining devoted to the duty of an intercessor/prophet like Moses, the bitterness of a leader who is losing his primacy comes through clearly. Another interesting issue

51. McKenzie, *David*, 29.

in this chapter is the demand for a king in the context of the Ammonite attack (12:12), as if the stories of demand for a king to fight the Philistines, the private anointment, and the Mizpah lottery have been forgotten. For 1 Sam 12 the monarchy began when Saul responded to a specific danger by mustering all the tribes in defense of Jabesh Gilead. This is the most rational of the accounts the writer had. The folk tale of the anointment after Saul's search for the lost asses and the unlikely choice of a king by lottery are alternative *logoi* that have been inserted into the larger text for general interest, but are here dismissed or ignored. That would support the interpretation of *neḥadeš* in 11:14 as "let us inaugurate" instead of "renew" the kingdom at Gilgal after the defeat of Ammon, and would suggest that the writer or redactor made Samuel's speech follow specifically that event.

Saul and His Opponents: Philistines, Amalekites, Samuel (1 Sam 13–15)

First Samuel's fragmentary account of Saul's reign focuses on two battles, a tale of Jonathan's heroism, and Samuel's growing opposition. As such Dtr uses the material on Saul's shortcomings to demonstrate why YHWH rejected him in favor of David, and takes the opportunity to present Jonathan as a bold warrior at odds with his father — and almost executed by him — before the arrival of David. In these narratives, as he was in 1 Sam 12, Samuel is still the good prophet, priest, and agent of YHWH, whose resentment and petulance are manifest, perhaps even to ancient readers.

In 1 Sam 13 Saul is encamped at Gilgal, his soldiers are melting away before the threat of a Philistine attack, and Samuel is late for a sacrifice that was to have helped rally the men. Saul can wait no longer and offers up the sacrifice himself, whereupon Samuel arrives and berates him for not having obeyed his (YHWH's) instructions. Then in chapter 15 Samuel directs Saul to wage a war of *ḥerem* against the Amalekites: no prisoners and no spoil are to be taken. When Samuel finds that the victorious Israelites have indeed taken spoil and left the Amalekite king alive, he castigates Saul with prophetic poetry (15:22–23 and perhaps 28–30). Both instances are vehicles for Samuel's declaration that YHWH has rejected Saul as king, and that he and his dynasty will be replaced by someone closer to YHWH's heart.

The Amalekite episode, with its prose and poetic rhetoric, is a late invention. The motive for the war, which takes Saul far afield into the south, is not for any current practical reason but to avenge the Amalekite attack on Israel reported in Deut 25:17–19. The Amalekites, allegedly slaughtered by Saul, are still active in the south when David fights them later on. As in Samuel's farewell speech, while the polemical intent is apparent, the details of action, character, and dialogue are extensive and rich. Saul is a pathetic

figure, begging Samuel for pardon or at least for a show of respect in front of his troops. A ripped garment is turned into a prophecy of symbolic perception. The prophet/priest Samuel shows an unexpected violent side when he cuts the Amakelite king Agag into pieces. This is a well-developed fictional composition, by Dtr perhaps,[52] or a pre-Dtr source, but not a reworking of an early account of a historical event.[53]

The lengthy and complex account of the battle against the Philistines in 1 Sam 13–14 is more convincing as something that might describe the period of Saul's reign, but Samuel's appearance here in connection with the premature sacrifice (13:8–14) also seems artificial and intrusive. Its polemical purpose is similar to that of chapter 15, but the incident of the sacrifice is not nearly as well developed as Saul's Amalekite fiasco. The message of blame and rejection is limited to two verses. It is not the only insertion into the main narrative.

Saul chooses two thousand Israelites to serve with him at Michmash and another thousand to serve under Jonathan at Gibeah, Saul's home base; he sends the rest of the people home (13:2). This is Jonathan's first appearance, but he is introduced simply by name without an explanation that he is Saul's son. Who were the rest of the people whom Saul dismissed — volunteer fighters, hangers-on, or the crowd that had declared him king at Gilgal? Our text must be a continuation of a previous account in which Jonathan and the other people were identified.

Jonathan opens the action by killing the Philistine prefect at Gibeah, an act of defiance the Philistines understand as rebellion. They gather an exaggeratedly large army — three thousand chariots, six thousand cavalry, and ground forces as many as the sands of the seashore — and camp at Michmash. The Israelites are frightened and flee or go into hiding (13:3–7a). The episode with Samuel and the sacrifice is inserted here, but it takes place at Gilgal, a sudden shift of location from the previous verses. Saul's impatience with regard to the sacrifice logically follows an introductory verse that has been misplaced in 10:8, in which Saul is directed to go to Gilgal, where he is to wait seven days for Samuel to come and offer sacrifice.

In a fresh beginning to the battle narrative (a different source?) Saul and Jonathan, now identified as his son, are in Gibeah with only six hundred remaining soldiers while the Philistines, camped at Michmash, send out columns on maneuvers (13:15b–18). A historical comment which may be another insertion (13:19–22) notes that the Philistines were in control of all metal working in the country, so that weapons were unavailable to the

52. Van Seters, *In Search of History,* 258ff.
53. McCarter, *I Samuel,* 269.

Israelites. Only Saul and Jonathan had swords and spears. With 13:23 we return to the narrative: the Philistines have set up an outpost at the Michmash pass. Jonathan and his armor bearer, without anyone else's knowledge, hazard a daring raid on this outpost. When they make their presence known, the Philistines taunt them, but Jonathan fells twenty of the enemy, his armor bearer following to finish off those who are still alive. The surprise attack causes great confusion among the Philistines, and the earth quakes (14:1–15). Saul's scouts spy the tumult. Puzzled, the king calls the roll and discovers that Jonathan is gone. He thinks about consulting the ephod before taking the field, but he decides against it when he hears the noise from the enemy camp. Not wishing to lose the opportunity, Saul leads his men against the confused Philistines and wins a great victory. Hebrews who have been fighting on the Philistine side defect to Saul, and Israelites who come out of hiding join him in pursuit of the foe.

So far, the story is a combination of Jonathan's heroic deed and the theme of the few vanquishing the many (so expressed by Jonathan to his armor bearer in 14:6), much like Gideon's victory over the Midianites and their allies in Judg 7. Gideon had pared his army down to three hundred men; Saul had only six hundred. A trick and the resultant confusion in the enemy camp like that caused by Jonathan had also won the day for Gideon. The point of Saul's hesitation about the ephod is unclear. Is it criticism of his failure to consult YHWH, praise of his perception that YHWH has already intervened, or simply a neutral part of a vivid narrative?

The battle spreads across the countryside. Saul now swears an oath cursing any Israelite who eats food before the evening, urging his men not to stop in pursuit of the foe. Jonathan is not present to hear this oath, and during the fighting he takes nourishment (14:23–30). When the oracle is silent on whether Saul should continue taking spoil through the night, he knows something is amiss. The *Urim* and *Tummim* point to Jonathan's transgression of his father's oath, and Saul has to be restrained by his troops from putting his son to death (14:36–46). Again the story recalls a familiar theme in Judges, this time Jephthah's oath which led to the sacrifice of his daughter (Judg 11). Criticism of Saul's rashness is highlighted again, but this time it is explicitly verbalized by his own son who, upon learning of the oath, declares it to be a military blunder, since the men could have fought longer and more effectively if they had nourished themselves (14:29–30). Jonathan's own impetuous actions were successful, so his sense of responsibility is not called into question. Whatever source the tale of his daring raid came from, it is used in a way not complimentary to Saul, and it marks the first time he and Jonathan had a major disagreement, perhaps anticipating their later estrangement over David.

Yet another insertion (14:31–35) is more sympathetic toward Saul. Having defeated the Philistines at Michmash, the exhausted soldiers slaughter and eat captured sheep and cattle. Their sin has nothing to do with a curse; it is that they were eating the meat with its blood. Saul prepares a makeshift altar so that they could slaughter properly. The premise of this story need not be anachronistic. Archaeologists have pointed to the rarity of pig bones at proto-Israelite sites in the central highlands as an ethnic marker;[54] the prohibition of eating blood may well be as old. Is this an alternative tradition to Saul's foolish oath, one that deals instead with a religious problem that came up during the battle of Michmash?

First Samuel 13–14 has woven together a number of units: the murder of the Philistine prefect at Gibeah, the fear of the Israelites at Philistine retaliation, the hasty sacrifice at Gilgal and Samuel's condemnation of Saul, the confrontation at Michmash, Philistine control of metal working, Jonathan's *arete* and the confusion among the Philistines, the victory of six hundred men over a large army, Saul's curse on eating and the near execution of Jonathan, and the matter of eating blood. It is impossible to say how many different sources were drawn upon by Dtr and what was Dtr's own invention. The core of the long account is the heroic tale of Jonathan's bravery. If we discount the war against Amalek in 1 Sam 15 as a late addition, the battle of Michmash is all we have of Saul's military career, and even it has been manipulated in places to derogate Saul.

The end of 1 Sam 14 is a summary statement about Saul's accomplishments and a listing of his family members (wife Ahinoam; sons Jonathan, Yishwi, and Malkishua; daughters Merab and Michal) and army chief Abner (14:51). He fought and bested his enemies round about — Moab, the Ammonites, Edom, the kings of Zobah, and the Philistines (v. 47). A second verse (48) which supplements the list by referring to the incident in 1 Sam 15 reports that he fought Amalek and rescued Israel from its spoilers. This material may be variously interpreted. (1) It is an old summary of Saul's real wars and victories; the details have been suppressed to make David's accomplishments greater. Dtr tended to derogate Saul; he would not have given him credit for such success if it wasn't known to be true. (2) If we believe that, then we can see Saul as having properly defended Israel and even as having made territorial gains. (3) The list is formulary and does not represent reality. Saul was a small-time guerrilla leader whose "victories" were exaggerated and who never controlled territory beyond the central highlands. (4) It is unlikely that Saul had major conflicts outside the central highlands with Edom and Zobah, or even with Moab. And he never fought

54. E.g., Dever, *What Did the Biblical Writers Know?* 113.

Amalek; verse 48 is an afterthought added when the story of the Amalekite *ḥerem* was invented.

Second Samuel 8, to be examined in chapter 8, is a catalogue of David's victories that runs to greater detail than the list of Saul's successes in 1 Sam 14:47–48. Note the roster of David's defeated enemies: the Philistines, Moab, Zobah (and Damascus, who came in to aid Zobah), and Edom. The Amalekites, whom the tradition has David defeating earlier in his career, before he became king (1 Sam 30), are not listed. The vanquished enemies are the same as Saul's, and a list of David's officers is also appended in 2 Sam 8. Is there a relationship between Saul's list and David's more detailed summary? Was the enumeration of Saul's victories just a formula which listed neighbors in all geographical directions, perhaps inspired by David's catalogue, or if it reflected actual confrontations, could the fuller accounts behind the list have been usurped and applied to David either by David's propagandists or by Dtr? It would not be the only example of such usurpation.

Anointment of David (1 Sam 16:1–13)

Most scholars since Rost have considered Samuel's anointment of David at the direction of YHWH to be a late addition to the text by a prophetic supplement, Dtr, or a later hand. Because the event is never again mentioned in the narrative, McKenzie thinks it is a post-Dtr theological interpolation, but Halpern assigns it to one of the early sources from the time of Solomon.[55]

Whatever its date, the account itself is constructed on a folkloric theme. David is the youngest of seven (or eight) sons (three of whom are mentioned by name), a mere shepherd. He is the least likely candidate for future kingship. But YHWH tells Samuel to look beyond appearances — like oldest brother Eliab's height — to the heart. The characteristics of the other named brothers are not given. When Samuel dismisses the lineup of Jesse's sons, he asks whether there are any others? He is told that the youngest, David, is with the sheep. Samuel sees that he is the one.

The three named brothers appear again in 1 Sam 17 in the non-LXXB version of the Goliath story. This might indicate that the anointment was part of the non-LXXB tradition and not an independent narrative. Eliab chides David for even thinking about challenging Goliath. This is perhaps an indication that the passage is not a continuation of the anointment scene, given that Eliab does not know David has been tapped for greatness; more likely the two passages are part of the same source and Eliab is merely exhibiting resentment or jealousy at being passed over by Samuel in favor of his baby brother. While 1 Sam 16:1–13 fits Dtr's purpose and may have

55. McKenzie, *King David;* Halpern, *David's Secret Demons,* 18ff.

been edited accordingly, it is not impossible that the credentials of prophetic anointment, like Saul's, may have been attached before Dtr to a longer heroic account represented by the non-LXXB stratum in 1 Sam 17–18.

See above, chapter 3, for a detailed discussion of the structural and chronological relationship of the LXXB and non-LXXB texts to each other, and below for a discussion of Halpern's treatment of the sources.

McKenzie considers significant the imagery of David as a shepherd and its relationship to the metaphor of kings as shepherds.[56] I would not make too much of this. Raising sheep was ubiquitous in ancient Near Eastern economies; youngsters inevitably got the assignment of tending them. In a rags-to-riches or unknown-to-hero tale, from where else would the protagonist come if not from the sheep pastures? The story itself does not make anything of the metaphor.

David's Appearance at Saul's Court (1 Sam 16:14–23)

Saul once had YHWH's divine spirit, but now it has been replaced with an evil one that makes him depressed. His retainers suggest music therapy; they hear of a talented son of Jesse the Bethlehemite, "a musician and man of valor and warrior and clever in speaking and handsome, and YHWH is with him" (16:18). Saul sends messengers to Jesse and summons his son from tending the sheep. David arrives at court with gifts from Jesse for the king. Saul "loved him greatly and made him his armor bearer" (16:19–21). Verse 22 again has Saul sending to Jesse saying that David will stand before him because he has found favor in his eyes, a confirmation that David will remain at court. Finally (16:23) we are told that David's lyre playing succeeds in removing the evil spirit.

I have already discussed at length in chapter 6 the parallels between this text and Nicolaus of Damascus's account of the Lydian usurper Gyges. The contrast between the innocent young shepherd of the anointment passage (16:1–13) and the talented young warrior of 16:14–23 is striking. The latter is just the beginning of a romantic adventure story leading into the LXXB version of 1 Sam 17–18.

For McKenzie the capsule description of David as an ideal Israelite, when read in the context of the other material about David, presents a true picture of what David really was.[57] He was handsome, "with a ruddy complexion and thick, reddish-brown, uncontrollable hair." The hair color comes from 16:12; its thickness from 19:13, where Michal helps David escape from Saul by putting a household idol in a bed and simulating his head

56. *King David*, 47–50.
57. Ibid., 56–67.

with goat hair. He was of small stature — hence the contrast with Eliab's height (expressed) and Saul's (implied). He was short enough for Michal's idol to fool David's pursuers. He was clever in speaking, as demonstrated in the way he handled his employer, Achish of Gath (1 Sam 27), and in his dialogues with Saul (1 Sam 24 and 26) after sparing his life. David must have been a resourceful diplomat. He was a musician and magician, able to expel spirits with his playing. He was a talented warrior. David lived by his wits and his military skills. Born to a wealthy noble (*gibbor ḥayil*) of Bethlehem, he was the youngest and so would not inherit the family property; therefore he went off to find his fortune as a squire, soldier, and mercenary. And he "no doubt saw himself as a faithful servant of YHWH who was rewarding him in kind."[58] McKenzie's wonderful description is all logical deduction but is, of course, based on the premise that the source of the text is contemporary with David and may reflect actual history.

Halpern, who argues that the real picture of the historical David begins only with his career as mercenary for the Philistines, nevertheless speculates about David's beginnings.[59] The origin of his name is unclear; it is perhaps non-Israelite. Jesse was surely the name of his father. References to David by only the patronymic, "son of Jesse," are generally derogatory; Saul calls him this seven times in 1 Sam 20 and 22 when he denounces him for treason to his son and to his followers.

I find that the other references to David as "son of Jesse" are, interestingly enough, in parallelism, if not in clear poetic parallelism. Nabal exclaims (1 Sam 25:10), "Who is David/ And who is the son of Jesse? These days many servants run away from their masters!" Sheba son of Bichri's cry to rebellion (2 Sam 20:1, identical with the northern cry for a break with Rehoboam in 1 Kgs 12:16) is, "We have no portion in David/ And no share in the son of Jesse./ To your tents, O Israel!" Might these passages be evidence for the possibility of poetic narratives behind the prose as the earliest form of the stories?

David vs. Goliath and the Aftermath (1 Sam 17–20)

I refer the reader back to chapter 3, where the confrontation between David and the Philistine champion has been analyzed as legend or romance, with no historical value. The discussion included the issue of whether the LXXB and non-LXXB material constituted one or two sources. The question of sources is taken up again below.

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58. Ibid., 66.
59. Halpern, *David's Secret Demons*, chap. 15, esp. 266ff., 270ff.

There is broad agreement that the story is legend or folk tale, and that the killing of Goliath was transferred from Elhanan (2 Sam 21) to David. McKenzie, however, does not dismiss the tale so easily. He maintains the position that the historical David did become prominent defeating a formidable Philistine warrior of unknown name, and that the real cause of the struggle between David and Saul was the king's mistrust of David's ambition.[60] For Halpern, the Goliath episode is part of the old tradition about David before his mercenary days and thus not history. The story was constructed from heroic elements in 2 Sam 21 and 23: Elhanan's victory, Eleazar son of Dodo's battle (in Pas-Dammim according to 1 Chr 11:13 = Ephes-Dammim of 1 Sam 17:1), and Benaiah's fight with the Egyptian in which he killed him with his own spear. Like the duels of David's warriors with the Philistines, notes Halpern, the Goliath tale may also be a part of the apology that seeks to minimize David's connections with Israel's enemies by making him a famous slayer of Philistines.[61]

McKenzie dismisses the non-LXXB material as late and sees the course of events according to LXXB through 1 Sam 18 as part of the apologetic tradition, in which he always seems to find at least a kernel of truth. His order of events in the early *apologetic* narrative after the battle with Goliath is as follows:

- David marries Michal. (18:20–25)
- On their wedding night Michal deceives Saul's men in helping David escape her father. (19:11–17)
- Jonathan dissuades Saul from killing David, but Saul makes another attempt and David escapes. (19:1–10)
- David flees to Samuel at Naioth, where the prophet casts the spirit upon Saul and his men. (19:18–24)
- Jonathan makes a pact with David and gives him a final warning about Saul's intentions. (20:1–42)

McKenzie thinks that the *historical* David did indeed marry Michal, but not until *after* Saul's death; the story of the earlier marriage serves apologetic purposes to help legitimize David as part of the royal family. The historical Jonathan may indeed have befriended David at the beginning — David's kindness to Mephibaal may have been out of true affection — but their continuing relations after David's break with Saul, and certainly their pact, are not credible and are also apologetic. What is being covered up in these tales

60. McKenzie, *King David,* 70–78.
61. Halpern, *David's Secret Demons,* 136, 148f.

of David's escape from Saul's wrath is that the historical David attempted a coup, and failing, fled Saul's pursuit.[62]

For Halpern, David's entire service at Saul's court was an apologetic fabrication; so the comradeship with Jonathan was "probably invented or inferred, not recollected" from David's later sparing of Mephibaal, Jonathan's son, when he exterminated the other Saulide heirs. Also invented was the betrothal to Michal, which made David Saul's lieutenant.[63]

My alternative view is that the underlying stories are neither history nor propagandistic fabrication. If 1 Sam 17–18 is based on two versions (LXXB and non-LXXB) of a folk tale in which a previously obscure or untried figure kills a giant, is hailed as a hero, marries the princess, and becomes a regular at the court, then we are left with literary, not necessarily historical, characters like Michal and Jonathan who became part of the popular tradition, to be used apologetically by Dtr. McKenzie's hypothetical order of events makes the narrative run smoothly, but if the LXXB version is to be its base, one must note that Jonathan does not appear in LXXB of 1 Sam 17–18. David becomes intimate with a member of Saul's family. In LXXB it is Michal; in non-LXXB, where Merab is spurned, it is Jonathan. In the series of escape adventures that follow, Saul throws a spear at David, who slips away (19:10, repeating 18:11), and Michal and Jonathan help David in separate parallel accounts (19:1ff, 19:11ff., 20:1ff.); they never appear together. The Naioth episode may follow any of David's escapes or it may be a completely independent tradition. Each story has its own devices: fakery with the *teraphim,* warning by arrows, casting of the spirit. They are different tales within a heroic tradition of narrow escapes. Whether any combination of them ever constituted a connected narrative prior to Dtr is very difficult to ascertain; and there is no support for suggestions that some of them but not others reflect historical events even vaguely, or for the establishment of a chronology of such events.

Other elements in the aftermath of the Goliath duel point to multiple folk traditions. These have been amply discussed above in chapter 3, so I only mention them here as a reminder. The excessive praise of David by the Israelite women (18:7) is a poetic fragment. Saul's plan to have David killed by sending him out to collect one hundred Philistine foreskins in return for Michal's hand backfires when the prospective son-in-law and potential usurper returns with two hundred (18:21–28). The theme of assigning unreasonable tasks to the hero is folkloric, with a notable parallel in the

62. McKenzie, *King David,* 77–88.
63. Halpern, *David's Secret Demons,* 283f.

tale of Gyges. In the midst of Saul's tirade against Jonathan for supporting David, Saul makes a sudden attack on the questionable sexual morality of Jonathan's mother (20:30), apparently Ahinoam, Saul's wife named in 14:50, with no explanation for the reader. This brief reference presupposes an underlying narrative tradition, and has led to speculation concerning a liaison between the king's wife and David, who later married an Ahinoam (25:43).

David the Fugitive (1 Sam 21–26)

The town of Nob, where the Elide priesthood had a shrine, is the focus of two intertwined themes, though one is fully played out and the other cut short. David, in flight from Saul but pretending to be on a mission from the king, is given food and a weapon, the sword of Goliath, by Ahimelek the priest (21:2–10). Saul, angry that David has escaped, paranoically accuses his men of not having alerted him to David's plotting. One of his officers, Doeg the Edomite, had been a witness to Ahimelek's aid to David, and now reports the event. The priest is hauled before Saul, who rejects Ahimelek's protestations that first, David would not betray his employer and father-in-law, and second, that he was ignorant of David's true status of outlaw. Saul commands the execution of Ahimelek and the priests of Nob. The Israelites refuse to lay hands on the priests, but Doeg, a foreigner, has no compunctions. He exceeds his orders to kill the eighty-five priests, and massacres the entire population of the town, killing the livestock as well. Only the priest Abiathar escapes to join David (22:6–23).

In the first of a series of stories about Saul's pursuit of David, the primary theme is the deterioration of Saul, his growing paranoia and resort to increasing violence. Is the slaughter carried out by Doeg, which includes the animals, to be construed as a *ḥerem,* ironically putting Saul in the position of Samuel against Amalek, but ordering the death of the innocent? The character development is very strong, as reflected in the dialogue. Saul is not only furious about David, but he is disappointed by Jonathan, who he feels has betrayed both his father's policy and his own interests. Everyone is plotting against him. David, meanwhile, offers protection to the innocent priestly escapee.

The second theme has been studied at length above (chap. 3): the sword of Goliath. That this is a special sword is stated in 21:10: "There is none like it." But the career of this sword hits a dead end. David has it, but it is not mentioned again in the tales collected by Dtr. The sword cries for speculation concerning its symbolic or magical role in David's ascent to the throne and beyond, but 1–2 Samuel's silence with regard to it reveals not even a hint of what that may have been in the folk traditions about David.

Between the parts of the Nob episode Dtr has inserted what appear to be independent items about David's flight. In the first (21:11–16), David hopes to find sanctuary from Saul with Achish of Gath, but the Gittites recognize him as a famous killer of Philistines, about whom the Israelite women sang praises (they quote the poem from 18:7). David realizes his error and immediately feigns madness, salivating and scratching on the gate. Thinking him insane and not wishing to admit him, the Gittites allow him to slink away.

Halpern sees this as another attempt to present David falsely as an enemy of the Philistines in order to counter his reputation as a Philistine mercenary.[64] McKenzie is closer to the mark. He recognizes the story as nonhistorical parody of the gullible Philistines and praise of David's cleverness.[65] It is only one of several stories about David's narrow escapes, in this case showing, with some humor, David's own craftiness. Dtr has arbitrarily placed the tale in its current location, after David's departure from Nob.

In the second inserted notice about David (22:1–2) we find the hero at the cave (*ma'arat*) of Adullam, where he is joined by relatives and some four hundred malcontents. David has become the leader of an outlaw gang.

The third insertion (22:3–5) has David going to Mizpeh of Moab in order to deposit his parents with the king of Moab to keep them safe from Saul. The text says they remained in Moab as long as David was in the stronghold (*meṣudah*). Then the prophet Gad, apparently David's advisor, tells him to leave the stronghold and move to Judah, and David does so, specifically to the forest of Heret.

The "stronghold" might be identical with the cave of Adullam, as indicated by 2 Sam 23:13–14, where the two appear to be identical. Otherwise, there are two locations and two independent traditions; and the location of the "stronghold," a generic term for a fortress or defensible hideout, is unknown. Gad appears in the text for the first time, without pedigree or introduction. Heret is mentioned only here. Thus we have two or three separate and unconnected items arranged in their present order and placed into the narrative of Nob by Dtr.

First Samuel 23:1–13 tells what on the surface appears to be a straightforward story centering on the Judaean town of Keilah. David rescues the town from an attack by the Philistines and subsequently settles down with his men behind its walls. Saul discovers David's whereabouts and prepares to besiege the town. When David realizes the local residents are willing to

64. Ibid., 20.
65. McKenzie, *King David*, 93.

turn him over to Saul, he and his approximately six hundred men leave ("they went wherever they would go," 23:13), frustrating Saul's pursuit.

What makes the story unusual is that it features no less than four questions posed to YHWH and answered by oracles. The first two, in which David simply seeks a response from YHWH, deal with whether or not he should advance upon the Philistines at Keilah. The last two, however, involve more specific details. Abiathar has brought the ephod, and it is used as a divining tool to inform David that Saul will attack Keilah, and then to confirm that the residents of the town plan to turn him over. The narrative appears to be based on this series of oracles that illustrate how David had divine help in his actions. This theme follows the earlier oft-repeated statement that YHWH was with David, and, perhaps with influence from a priestly source, highlights the role of Abiathar and the ephod (in contrast to Gad's prophetic advice?).

The Keilah pattern repeats itself. In 23:14–15a, 19–29 David is in the wilderness of Ziph, and the local residents again prepare to betray him to Saul. Once again, by the time the king arrives, David and his men have moved on, this time to the wilderness of Maon. Saul follows and is close to encircling his prey, but a message that the Philistines have invaded makes him abandon the pursuit to face the new threat. The place where this happened is consequently called *sela' hamaḥlekot*. This is another story of Saul's pursuit and David's escape. It may be an etiological story based on the place name, which can mean "the rock of contention" or "the rock of separation" in the context of this story.

Dtr has also inserted a propagandistic piece (23:15b–18) in which Jonathan visits David at Horesh and they renew their covenant. Jonathan even offers to serve as second-in-command to his ultimately victorious friend.

First Samuel 24 and 26 relate two versions of the same story: David has Saul in his power but refuses to kill him, demonstrating that he respects YHWH's anointed king and that Saul is wrong to suspect David of plotting to overthrow him. Both of the basic narratives are exciting. In chapter 24 David is at En Gedi and Saul pursues him with three thousand soldiers. By chance, the very cave where David and his men are hiding is the one Saul enters to relieve himself. This is the day he has been waiting for, David's men tell him; YHWH has provided the opportunity to be rid of his enemy. Instead, while Saul is squatting, David cuts off a piece of his cloak. Later David comes out of the cave and calls to Saul, brandishing the cut cloth as proof that he has no desire to harm him. Saul weeps, admits David is right, and gives up the pursuit.

In the second version, 1 Sam 26, the story is set as an alternate continuation of 23:19, where the Ziphites betray David. Saul and his three thousand

seek David in the wilderness of Ziph. David's scouts report where Saul has encamped. David sneaks into Saul's camp at night accompanied by Abishai, through the defensive perimeter and an inner circle of guards around the king that includes Abner, the head of Saul's army. Abishai declares that this opportunity to do away with David's nemesis is God-given and offers to run the sleeping Saul through. David restrains him, instead stealing Saul's spear and water jar and leaving the camp. Later David addresses Saul's army and Abner, chiding the embarrassed officer for his laxity in defending his king. Saul, shown the spear, admits that he has been wrong about David and calls off his pursuit.

The two versions of basically the same tale were separated by an unrelated story in 1 Sam 25, and each was awkwardly placed into a different geographical and chronological context. The first version of the tale is based on a bathroom joke; it demonstrates that humor also had a part in the popular traditions about David. The second, based on an act of bravado reminiscent of the deeds of David's warriors summarized in 2 Sam 23, is more complex. Three characters in addition to David and Saul are named: Ahimelek the Hittite, Abishai, and Abner. I have discussed Abishai as David's companion above (chap. 3); he and Abner are well-known figures in the biblical account. Ahimelek, though, is mentioned only here, and oddly enough, his name is brought up only to be dismissed from the story. David asks him and Abishai to accompany him on his raid into Saul's camp, but only Abishai volunteers (26:6); we hear nothing more of Ahimelek. Who was this Ahimelek the Hittite, evidently a member of David's band, that David would want him along on this adventure? Why did he refuse? The other Ahimelek in the life of David was the murdered Elide priest of Nob and father of Abiathar. A coincidence, or has the name of David's henchman been misreported in 1 Sam 26? We know of Uriah the Hittite from the Bathsheba incident, a loyal soldier of David. Could he have been the one from David's outlaw band called upon for a risky assignment and the names were confused? That is, of course, pure speculation. At all events, whoever Ahimelek the Hittite was, once again we have a hint that the tradition about David and his warriors was far more extensive than the material that found its way into our text.

Beyond what I have described as the basic narrative of the two versions, there are common elements in their dialogues. Already noted is David's refusal to kill YHWH's anointed. Questioning Saul's need to squelch his lowly enemy, David compares himself to a flea in both episodes (24:14 and 26:20). Saul calls David "my son" in 24:16 (David had addressed him as "my father" in 24:11) and in 26:17, 21, 25. Employing different wording, both versions have David calling upon YHWH to justify him and avenge the

wrongs done to him, or to smite Saul (24:12 and 26:10); and in both Saul openly admits he has been wrong (24:17 and 26:21).

There are also interesting points of difference. David's speech to Saul in chapter 24 includes a citation of a proverb (24:13). Saul acknowledges that David is destined to rule; David, in agreement with the king's request, swears that he will not harm Saul's descendants (24:20–22). In chapter 26 David's taunting of Abner (26:14–16) is an added feature. Instead of a proverb David's speech of self-justification to Saul includes a curious complaint that Saul's men have driven him away from a share in YHWH, telling him to go worship other gods (26:19), whatever the details behind such a remark might have been. Saul does not concede that David will rule; he merely blesses him and wishes him success (26:25).

There were two stories in circulation with the same theme of David's clever humiliation of Saul (and Abner in one case) by getting close enough to his enemy that he could take some object of his. They belong to the tradition of daring deeds that we find in 2 Sam 23. In fact, because of the length of the two tales, even without the justificatory speeches, we may have a glimpse into what such stories were like before they were abbreviated into a sentence or two as were most of the items in 2 Sam 23. To these tales of daring and cleverness someone has added protestations of David's innocence and has made them into apologetic statements. McKenzie and Halpern naturally include the two passages as nonhistorical elements in the Davidic or Solomonic apology, but it would seem preferable to assign the apologetic additions to Dtr. Would an early propagandist have taken two blatantly similar versions of a story and added two similar justifications just for effect? It is more reasonable to think that a later writer adopted parallel *logoi* from different traditions, one humorous and one more adventurous, but both heroic, that had developed over the years, arranged them in his larger account of David's rise, and adapted them through added dialogue to argue David's innocence and eventual legitimacy.

The final story from David's outlaw stage is in 1 Sam 25: the death of Nabal and David's marriage to the widow Abigail. A parenthetical note first reports that Samuel has died and that David has gone to the wilderness of Paran. The story then begins with Nabal, a great man from Maon (David was in the wilderness of Maon in 1 Sam 23) whose business in sheep and goats is in Carmel (of Judah). He is a stereotypical evil and churlish man with a beautiful wife, Abigail. David, running a protection racket,[66] attempts to extort goods from him. Nabal rejects the threats and belittles David as a common fugitive (25:2–12). David sets out to change his mind with four

66. Halpern, *David's Secret Demons*, 22, also uses this terminology.

hundred armed men, leaving two hundred to guard their equipment. Abigail, told by Nabal's employees that David's protection operation has actually been beneficial for their business, loads provisions on donkeys and rides to meet David, who is muttering threats of violence. Abigail, turning over the goods for David's band, entreats him not to bloody his hands by killing her husband, who is indeed a mean and churlish man (25:13–27). She adds that David should not have soiled hands, for YHWH has made him *nagid* of Israel and will grant him a dynasty (25:28–31). David accepts her plea and blesses her. When she returns home she finds Nabal in a drunken stupor from a lavish party he has thrown and waits until the next morning to relate the day's events. The news makes him drop like a stone from a stroke or heart attack, and in ten days he is dead (25:32–38). David, saying that Nabal got what he deserved, sends for Abigail. She eagerly rushes to him and they are married (25:39–43). An appended note reports that David also married Ahinoam of Jezreel, and that Saul had dissolved David's marriage to Michal and had given her to Palti son of Laish (25:43–44).

McKenzie and Halpern point out that David's marriage to Abigail advanced his political career.[67] Nabal was a major figure in Judah, perhaps its headman. He had connections to the Calebite clan in Hebron. David may have taken over his position as the beginning of his claim to rule in Judah. He ordered Nabal's murder and stole his wife, or better, he conspired with Abigail in the matter of his death, but the story absolves him from direct responsibility, shifting the blame onto Nabal's phlegmatic personality and YHWH's intervention (via illness). Halpern argues that David's contemporaries probably accused him of Nabal's murder — hence the apologetic story.[68]

None of this political analysis can hide the basic nature of the underlying tale. It is an outlaw romance with stereotypical characters. David is the dashing brigand, Nabal the obnoxious rich man — his very name means churl — and Abigail the beautiful wife, who, cursed by a marriage to a mean husband, falls in love with the handsome outlaw. A speech about David's destined rule has been put into Abigail's mouth by Dtr, but otherwise the story has no overt propagandistic material in itself. If David was defending himself against a charge of murder and wife-stealing, why would he do it through a story in which he depicted himself as a criminal? There is no attempt to hide the extortion activity, even though there is a suggestion that it was of ultimate benefit to those he protected, that is, his victims. David

67. McKenzie, *King David,* 99–101; see Levenson and Halpern, "The Political Import of David's Marriages," 507–18, discussed above, chap. 3.

68. Halpern, *David's Secret Demons,* 77.

appears as Robin Hood, protecting the Judaeans — but for a price. His threat to destroy all the men of Nabal's household ("every one who pisses on the wall," 25:22) is not particularly complimentary, but it shows him as a rough-and-tumble hero.

There is one narrative motif in this story that is duplicated in another. David goes off to fight with four hundred men while leaving two hundred to guard the gang's equipment (25:13). The same division of his troops is related in 1 Sam 30:9 when he rescues the captives of Ziklag. Perhaps this tale belongs to a later stage of his career when, as a mercenary serving the Philistines, he is said to have maintained good relations with Judah (see next section below). His operation is well organized, and his need to have a third of his private army guard the provisions implies the presence of a large camp if not a permanent base. It fits poorly between episodes in which David and his men have to keep moving around and hiding in caves in order to avoid capture by Saul.

First Samuel 25 is the tale of how David acquired a beautiful wife, paralleling the adventure in which he acquired his first wife, Michal. The reference to Ahinoam added at the end reminds us that there may have been yet another story of how David won her hand or perhaps stole her from Saul (see above, chap. 3). None of these stories are necessarily from the time of David; they all entered the popular tradition at some point. Dtr used two of them and hinted at the third.

David the Mercenary (1 Sam 27; 28:1–2; 29; 30)

First Samuel 27 is a study in ulterior motives and deception. In brief, David seeks asylum from Saul by joining Achish of Gath as a mercenary, first living at Gath with his six hundred men and then, upon request, being transferred to a new base at Ziklag. There David's assignment is to strike out against enemies of the Philistines in the Negev, but while he operates against Geshurites, Girzites, and Amalekites, he avoids attacking Judaeans and their associated populations of Yerahmeelites and Kenites. The additional details and omissions tell us more. First, no mention is made of David's previous attempt to seek the protection of Achish (1 Sam 21) which ended in David's feigned madness. That story was probably from an altogether different tradition. Second, Achish is happy to have someone of David's caliber. By sending him against Judaeans, whom the text has Achish deeming part of the people of Israel, he hopes to make David hateful to his fellow countrymen and so bind him forever to the service of Gath (27:12). David, however, is clearly using his position for his own purposes. He wants to be away from Philistine supervision, so he arranges to be sent from Gath to Ziklag. That he attacks everyone but Judaeans, Yerahmeelites, and Kenites is kept secret by

the elimination of witnesses — the systematic slaughter of all the men and women of the groups he defeats (27:11).

This picture gives us a cross between a crafty plotter who deceives his boss and a cruel Machiavellian killer who will not let innocent people pose a danger to his ambitions. Halpern regards this mercenary activity as the first real historical information about David. He and McKenzie, however, disbelieve the tale of David's deception in not operating against the Judaeans.[69] That is part of the apology intended to cover up David's successful career in the employ of Israel's enemies, which in reality made him fight also against Israelites. As previously noted, Halpern especially regards the texts in which David and his men fight *against* the Philistines as propagandistic fiction to gain the respect of the Judaeans and Israelites. But could an apology written during David's reign or early in Solomon's negate overt acts that were witnessed by people who might still be alive? Revising motivation or covering up a private action is one thing, but to deny public acts, like leading a troop of mercenaries in battle against your own people, is not workable. If this is apology, it must come long after the events. Dtr is more likely the author. He has given a pro-David spin to a story about his clever deception of a Philistine ruler and ruthless behavior toward other non-Israelites, something which never bothered Dtr. For Dtr these deeds made David a patriotic hero. Even without the spin, in a folktale about David's pro-Judaean deceitfulness and violence during his outlaw or mercenary days, these features would enhance rather than detract from his heroic qualities.

Another indication of late editing is the comment in 27:6 that since Achish gave Ziklag to David, that town has "belonged to the kings of Judah until this day." It is a redactional remark from a time when Judah and Israel were separated and a dynasty had been well established. It seems to be a statement of a claim rather than an etiology, and it must be from a time when Judah actually held the town. The period of Josiah's military expansion is a possibility.

Another tradition (1 Sam 28:1–2) has David permanently attached to Achish as his bodyguard. This reference may be understood as a reward for David's perceived loyalty or as an alternate tradition to the one that has David removed to Ziklag. In 1 Sam 29:6 Achish praises David's "going out and returning" with him in military actions since joining his service. Of course this would be David's duty whenever Achish went to war even though he normally resided at Ziklag. In the context of the larger narrative, it places David in the Gittite contingent that is part of the Philistine force being mustered against Saul.

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69. McKenzie, *King David,* 104; Halpern, *David's Secret Demons,* 78–80.

Preparations for the final battle that will mark Saul's demise begin in 1 Sam 29 with the Philistines gathering at Aphek. The leaders of the other Philistine towns reject the participation of David and his force of Hebrews, for he has been Saul's officer (29:3) and has the reputation as a killer of Philistines — they cite the Israelite women's praise of David again (29:5; cf. 18:7 and 21:12). Achish reluctantly sends him away, but not before David professes his loyalty and Achish compares him to an angel of God (29:8–9).

In light of David's deception of Achish in 1 Sam 27, his declaration of loyalty and statement that he always was ready to fight against his master's enemies (29:8) is unabashedly two-faced. The beginning of this protest, "But what have I done?" (29:8) is identical to the phrase in 26:18 where David argues his innocence to Saul. There the reader is supposed to believe David; here we know that David is lying, otherwise reading the text as apology would be senseless. In any case, David is removed from the battle in which Saul loses his life, whether we should credit an early royal propagandist or Dtr for this fortunate turn of the narrative. What remains consistent is the portrait of David as a deviously clever and opportunistic figure, that is, the perfect hero.

The end of this sequence of events is 1 Sam 30. David returns to Ziklag to find the town burned down and all the women and children, including David's wives Abigail and Ahinoam, carried off by the Amalekites. His men are so angry that they are ready to stone him. Abiathar and the ephod quickly produce an oracle that sends David in pursuit of the captors. He takes four hundred of his men and leaves two hundred behind to guard what is left of their possessions. With the help of an informer in the person of an abandoned Egyptian slave of the Amalekites, who also relates the full details of the Amalekite raid on Judaean settlements as well as Philistine Ziklag, David catches up to the enemy and inflicts a resounding defeat, only four hundred escaping on their donkeys. The wives and children are restored and the spoil is divided evenly among the four hundred victorious fighters and the two hundred left behind. Despite complaints by the combat troops, David insists that the rear guard, who were ordered to remain through no fault of their own, share equally. This principle is Israelite military policy "until this day" (30:25). Finally, part of the spoil is sent as gifts to the elders of some eleven named Judaean towns plus an unspecified number of Yerahmeelite and Kenite settlements.

This story has everything. Women and children are taken and dramatically rescued. The pious David acts only after consulting YHWH. The quality of his leadership is demonstrated by his fair division of the spoil. The accursed Amalekites are again defeated. David's currying favor among the Judaeans, who, according to the Egyptian slave also were victims of

the Amalekites, is advanced. McKenzie suggests that the historicity of the Amalekite raid is plausible, but that its timing is artificial, since it conveniently provides an alibi for David while Saul is being defeated in the north.[70] But because the episode serves so many purposes, we must also consider that it might be another concocted tale of adventure designed to demonstrate David's qualities of leadership on the eve of his rise to power. The inventive policy for division of spoils is attributed to David by a later hand ("until this day"), probably Dtr, or Dtr may have found this story in the traditional lore about David.

The Death of Saul (1 Sam 28:3–24; 31; 2 Sam 1)

First Samuel 28:3 reminds us of Samuel's death, already reported in 25:1. It is repeated here because we are also told that Saul has been zealous in removing all practitioners of divination from the country, and so, when the Philistines have gathered for war at Shunem and YHWH's oracle via the Urim and Tummim is silent, he has no place to turn. He seeks a diviner and is told about a woman at En Dor who is still practicing her art. Saul goes to her in disguise, and after assuring her that he is not on a mission of entrapment, he requests that she conjure up the ghost of Samuel. She succeeds in raising a godlike figure from the earth, and when she describes it Saul knows it is Samuel (28:13–14). The dead prophet reveals that YHWH has abandoned Saul in favor of David since the Amalekite fiasco and has become his enemy (read *ṣareka* for *'areka* in 28:16). Saul and his sons will die in battle and Israel will be defeated. Saul is overcome, but eventually accepts offered food and rest.

The story of En Dor may be a late addition, since it includes an obvious Deuteronomic passage which refers back to Saul's disobedience against Amalek and the general theme of YHWH's selection of David to replace Saul.[71] The occult story of Samuel's ghost itself, however, may be an earlier tradition with a Deuteronomic insertion. Halpern sees it as pre-Dtr, since the necromancy is not condemned out of hand. In fact, Saul's fanaticism in banning private diviners may even be seen as criticism. His sin is not consulting the woman; it is his hypocrisy.[72] I am not sure that this is a correct interpretation, but the story itself may still be earlier than Dtr. Like the tale of Samuel incapacitating Saul and his agents by casting the spirit upon them and making them prophesy, the appearance of Samuel's ghost can easily be drawn from a folk tradition. Compare the magical properties of Elisha's

70. McKenzie, *King David, 104.*
71. Ibid., 102, citing Van Seters, 261–64.
72. Halpern, *David's Secret Demons,* 22–23.

bones in 2 Kgs 13 and Odysseus's consultation with the raised shades of his dead comrades in *Odyssey* XI.

The account of Saul's final battle on Mt. Gilboa and his death is related in two versions in 1 Sam 31 and again in 2 Sam 1. The differences are significant. In 1 Sam 31 the names of the three sons who die with him are specifically given as Jonathan, Abinadab, and Malkishua. When it becomes clear that the battle is lost, Saul asks his armor bearer to dispatch him. But the armor bearer refuses and Saul falls upon his own sword. The Philistines occupy towns in the Valley (of Jezreel) and even beyond the Jordan from which the Israelites have fled. The victors strip and decapitate the bodies of Saul and his sons, taking his armor home to be placed in a temple of Astarte and hanging the corpses on the wall of Beth Shan. The people of Jabesh Gilead remove the bodies, burn them, and give the bones decent burial.

The second account in 2 Sam 1 has David just returned to Ziklag three days after his defeat of the Amalekites, when a survivor of Gilboa arrives to report the death of Saul and Jonathan. This survivor turns out to be an Amalekite who says he has personally fulfilled the request of the wounded Saul to put him out of his misery. He has brought Saul's crown and bracelet to David. David and his men mourn the deaths of Saul, Jonathan, and the men of Israel until the evening. Then David has the Amalekite killed for putting forth his hand against YHWH's anointed. The famous poem of lamentation (1 Sam 1:17–27), quoted from the Scroll of Yashar, is appended to this account.

The second account is blatantly propagandistic. Second Samuel 1:1 leaves no doubt of David's noninvolvement with the events by stating that he was away fighting the Amalekites and that this was after Saul's death. The mourning (though only for part of a day) and the public execution of the messenger strengthen the impression of David's innocence, and David's poem of lamentation strengthens it further. Unlike the first account in 1 Sam 31, where Saul kills himself after his aide refuses to dispatch him, the second account in 2 Sam 1 has the Amalekite kill the king, a detail which allows a demonstration of David's piety and loyalty through the messenger's execution. Both Saul and Jonathan are emphasized in 2 Sam 1 in the Amalekite's report (1:4), in David's mourning (1:12), and by their appearance together in the lament.

The version of 1 Sam 31, by contrast, refers to three of Saul's sons with no particular emphasis on Jonathan. It is concerned with the diminution of Saul's house rather than with the personal relationship of David and Jonathan. The Philistines' deposit of Saul's armor in a temple parallels the deposit of Goliath's arms at a shrine. Their treatment of the bodies of Saul

and his sons lets the author close the circle of Saul's career by having the people of Jabesh Gilead repay Saul for the act that launched his monarchy.

McKenzie and Halpern reject the historicity of David's noninvolvement at Gilboa in both stories. For McKenzie, David must have challenged Saul's domination in Judah and was ultimately responsible for toppling him. David would not have been absent from the final battle against Saul, which was probably not at Gilboa, a site too far to the north. But the presence of Gilboa in the poem of lament as well as in the prose would indicate that it was the battle site in early traditions. Halpern concludes that David's subsequent coronation at Hebron was simply the Philistines' reward for his participation against Saul.[73]

A tradition about Saul's tragic defeat and suicide is common to both accounts and is probably an early one. Falling on one's sword is a heroic gesture. While it provides an opportunity for apology in the second version, it appears to have no ulterior purposes in the first. As for the poem of lament in 2 Sam 1, we may ask, as scholars do in the case of the Song of Deborah (Judg 5) and the Song at the Red Sea (Exod 15), whether the poetic description of the battle of Gilboa preceded or followed the prose account. If it preceded it as part of a longer heroic poetic narrative of Saul's and David's time, it may contain the earliest literary version of the tradition — which is not to say that it came from the time of Saul and David. It is a fragment of a developed literary work of heroic, perhaps epic poetry. It includes the close relationship of David and Jonathan upon which Dtr later based his prose passages about the covenant between them. Dtr or another redactor adds the comment, perhaps true, that the poem was used in the military training of Judaean youth (2 Sam 1:18).

The Issue of Sources

Van Seters[74] proposed that the history of David was put together by Dtr through an arrangement of originally independent units of tradition, or *logoi,* especially in the description of David's rise to power. He denied that there were longer literary documents with connected episodes prior to Dtr. For those who posit the existence of a systematic royal apology from the time of David or Solomon, such a longer document must have existed centuries before Dtr and must have been sufficiently authoritative for Dtr to adopt it as the core of his history. Halpern is the most recent scholar to take this position. In *David's Secret Demons* he argues that the story of David's rise was composed by the combination early on of *two* longer sources in

73. McKenzie, *King David,* 104–5; Halpern, *David's Secret Demons,* 296.
74. Van Seters, *In Search of History,* 355–58; see discussion above, chap. 2.

order to form the apology for the period up to David's assumption of the kingship, that is, until Saul's death. Reference to the two sources, called A and B, is made throughout the book, and an appendix charts them out from 1 Sam 8 to 2 Sam 1.[75]

In my own research I had also attempted to see whether or not there might be consistent threads in the narrative that would indicate the presence of longer sources. I began by separating out the different sets of details in 1 Sam 17–18, the tale of David and Goliath and its immediate aftermath, as they appeared in the material of the LXXB and non-LXXB accounts. I concluded (see above, chap. 3) that these were not supplementary to each other, but that they constituted two separate versions of the David and Goliath legend with notable differences in detail, for example, the exclusive presence of Michal in LXXB and that of Merab and Jonathan in non-LXXB. I then attempted to trace such differences in the episodes that preceded and followed, as well as to recognize the connective links that tied the different sets of passages together. I thought that there were several series of tales that reflect similar details and thus similar origins, but in order to link the passages together in a logical way I would have to assume that certain verses were redactional, as others have done, or that sometimes elements from one source intruded into the material of another. In the end I abandoned my effort to find longer connected sources in favor of Van Seters's argument that we are dealing with a host of independent units, although some of them might be related to each other. The very existence of different versions of an episode indicates literary development over time, probably both oral and written. The more or less independent units and versions appear to have undergone a "fixing of the legend," which would have included a recognizable canon of popular stories about David, before Dtr manipulated the material into its present appearance.

The following pages discuss the issue of longer and shorter sources, offering a critique of Halpern's delineation of his A and B sources, and some suggestions from the perspective of my own interpretation.

Samuel and Saul (1 Sam 8–15)

Source critics noted long ago that Saul is declared king three times, and that while some of the material has YHWH and Samuel favorably disposed toward the idea of kingship and toward Saul (1 Sam 9–10:16; 11; and perhaps 13:1–7a, 15–23; 14), much of the text is clearly negative toward both (8; 10:17–27; 12; 13:7b–14; 15). It is often argued that the combined text shows the ambivalence toward the institution of monarchy among the

75. Halpern, *David's Secret Demons*, 277–79.

Israelite tribes, and/or that it reflects pro-Saul and pro-David (i.e., anti-Saul) strata.

Halpern describes Source A as sometimes capable of sympathy toward Saul. Here it includes 1 Sam 9:1–10:13, the lost asses and private anointment (10:14–16 on Saul's keeping his anointment secret is considered a redactional intrusion) and then jumps to 1 Sam 13–14, where Jonathan and Saul fight against the Philistines at Michmash. The story of Samuel's condemnation of Saul for not waiting for the prophet to arrive for a sacrifice (13:7b–14) is included in A, as is the summary of Saul's victories and a list of his family members (14:47–52).

The B source, never showing sympathy toward Saul, is found in 1 Sam 8, the popular demand for a king and Samuel's warning about kingship; 10:17–27, the lottery at Mizpah; 11, Saul's victory over Ammon and subsequent confirmation as king at Gilgal; 12, Samuel's farewell speech; and 15, the condemnation of Saul for his disobedience against Amalek. Halpern thus separates the two episodes in which Samuel denounces Saul and assigns them to different sources: the Gilgal sacrifice to A, and the Amalek incident to B. Sympathetic to Saul or not, both sources carry the theme of Saul's unworthiness.

I would think that the "negative" material begins already at 1 Sam 7:5ff., where Samuel and YHWH successfully defeat the Philistines, making the Israelite demand for a king in chapter 8 all the more ungrateful and sinful. The request for a king occurs at Ramah, the lottery at Mizpah, and the condemnation for the premature sacrifice at Gilgal. In the war against Ammon Saul is a great hero; there is nothing of a negative tradition. The Gilgal coronation (11:14–15) poses a problem because it is unnecessary, given the lottery. If *neḥadesh* in 11:14 is taken to mean the monarchy is to be reconfirmed at Gilgal, then the reconfirmation must follow an earlier designation of Saul as king, with something happening in between to merit the reconfirmation. Thus Halpern unexpectedly places the account of the Ammonite war, which is very sympathetic to Saul, in the nonsympathetic Source B. I have argued above for a different translation of *neḥadesh,* and that the Gilgal confirmation was not related to the Ammonite war, although Dtr's arrangement of texts makes it appear so. The misplaced line in 10:8, which has Samuel directing Saul to wait seven days for him at Gilgal, is a lead-in to the sacrifice story of 13:7b–14, not the Gilgal coronation. The latter would then be a completely independent tradition. Samuel's speeches about the evils of kingship and the entire farewell speech (in chaps. 8 and 12) are Deuteronomic and not part of an early source.

What we should be looking for instead of long connected narratives like Halpern's A and B sources is a number of separate traditions, especially

when the transitions from one to another are absent and unclear. I suggest the following:

(a) *The Mizpah tradition.* Samuel's victory over the Philistines and the selection of a king by casting lots. In 1 Sam 7:5ff. Samuel is presented as a successful judge; his sacrifice and prayer on behalf of the assembled Israelites at Mizpah leads to YHWH's defeat of the Philistines by means of a storm. At the end of the chapter (7:16–17) is an editorial note that Samuel worked a circuit that included Bethel, Gilgal, and Mizpah, but that his home was in Ramah. This information serves as a transition to the coming episodes which take place at Ramah, Mizpah, and Gilgal. The Mizpah tradition continues in Samuel's convening of the people at that site for a lottery to choose a king (10:17–27). This is the same place where the tribes met in Judg 20 to condemn the Benjaminites for the gang rape at Gibeah — for which, ironically, Saul's tribe of Benjamin was shunned — as well as the assembly in 1 Sam 7. In this group of stories Mizpah is considered the appropriate place for pan-tribal assemblies.

Samuel's accusation of the people as rejecting YHWH (10:18–19) is a Deuteronomic addition, as is his speech on the law of the kingship and its commitment to writing (10:25). At the end (10:26f.) Saul, having been selected by the casting of lots, returns home to Gibeah, where he is joined by some hopeful loyalists and denigrated by cynics. In the present arrangement of the material in 1 Samuel, the reader can see the continuation of this story either in the Ammonite war (1 Sam 11) or the call to coronation at Gilgal (11:14f.), but originally the Mizpah material may have stood alone as one of several stories of Saul's ascent.

The Mizpah story may have been favorable toward Saul initially: selection by the casting of lots is a demonstration of the divine will;[76] Saul is described as a tall, imposing, though bashful, figure; and Samuel says of Saul that there is none like him. But the Deuteronomic additions, the possible implication that selection by luck of the draw is inferior to popular acclaim after a worthy deed, and the later statement that Samuel could wash his hands of all blame because it was the people and YHWH who made the choice (12:13) make the framework a negative one for the reader of the entire 1 Samuel text.

(b) *The Ramah tradition.* The people come to Samuel at home in Ramah to ask for a king, and Samuel prays to YHWH for guidance (1 Sam 8:4–6). YHWH responds (8:22) in the affirmative, and Samuel sends the people home. The verses in between (7–21) include the statement that the demand for a king is a rejection of YHWH and Samuel's warning about what kings

76. Ibid., 16.

do. This entire section is a Deuteronomic addition. The request at Ramah is not specifically connected with the events at Mizpah described in 1 Sam 7. Only the comment about Samuel's travels and permanent residence in Ramah make for apparent continuity. The concluding statement that Samuel dismissed the people after YHWH agreed to their request (8:22) makes it possible to see the next step either as Samuel's anointment of Saul in 1 Sam 9–10:16 or the next Mizpah assembly in 10:17ff. Even the Ammonite war (11:1ff.) or the invitation to Gilgal (11:14f.) could be appropriate continuations. The arrangement of these stories that makes multiple combinations possible is itself a suggestion that the components may have originally been independent of each other.

(c) *The legend of the lost asses*. The lengthy folklore-rich story (9:1–10:16 minus 10:8, which is an intrusion from another tradition) features YHWH's initiation of kingship, Samuel as a clairvoyant seer, a private anointment, the bestowal of the divine spirit, and an etiology. Most interesting is that it is set in a completely vague location — not Ramah, or Mizpah, or Gilgal. The last three verses in the story (10:14–16), in which Saul keeps his anointment secret, again admits multiple avenues of continuity, allowing him to be introduced afresh to the people at Mizpah, in the Ammonite war, and/or at Gilgal.

(d) *The Ammonite war (1 Sam 11:1–13)*. Nahash the Ammonite's attack on Jabesh Gilead begins the story. Messengers come to Gibeah where Saul has been plowing with oxen. The divine spirit, or spirit of God (*elohim,* not YHWH) comes upon him, and in a dramatic summons reminiscent of the judges, he takes action by mustering 303,000 (!) men of Israel and Judah. After his victory the people threaten with death those who did not (as in LXX and the sense of the passage) want Saul to rule (11:12). Who opposed Saul's rule? The only identifiable candidates are those who refused to show Saul respect at the end of the Mizpah lottery episode (10:27). In that case, the Ammonite war is connected sequentially to the Mizpah declaration of kingship. But the transformation of Saul from the bashful bumpkin who hid among the baggage to the take-charge leader of the Ammonite story would be astounding. The closeness in format of 1 Sam 11 to the tales in Judges, where a simple civilian is called to serve his people, suggests that this is another separate tradition meant to introduce Saul. Why was Saul farming instead of attending to kingly matters, even if some individuals scorned him? It seems that something has been manipulated to give the appearance of a transition. The threats of death in 11:12 may be a link with 10:27, but an equally good prior scene for this story is the ending, original or redactional, to the legend of the lost asses, in which Saul returns to his family's farming pursuits, refusing to divulge the secret of his anointment (10:14–16).

But here, too, the shift from legend to tale of military adventure would best indicate separate origins.

First Samuel 11:1–13, then, represents an independent tradition that describes Saul's rise to recognition and kingship through his leadership against Ammon. The gratitude of the Jabesh Gileadites is a witness to this tradition later on in 1 Sam 31, when they bury the bodies of Saul and his sons.

(e) *Gilgal I (1 Sam 11:14–15)*. Samuel calls the people together to "inaugurate" the kingdom — if that is how *neḥadesh* is translated. That would make it a separate tradition about the origin of the monarchy, and the occasion for it could be anything, including the victory over the Ammonites. If we translate "renew," then it is continuation from one of the other kingmaking stories. In either case, why at Gilgal?

(f) *Gilgal II (1 Sam 10:8; 13:4b, 7b–15a)*. Near the end of the lost asses legend Samuel commands Saul to proceed to Gilgal and wait seven days for the prophet to come, to offer sacrifices, and to tell Saul what to do next (10:8). The verse has nothing to do with the narrative in which it is embedded. The continuation is not the inauguration of kingship labeled Gilgal I, but 13:4b, where the Israelites join Saul in preparation for a fight with the Philistines. But the text before and after 13:4b has the action taking place in Gibeah, Michmash, and Bethel. Then in verses 7b–14 we are told that Saul and all the people are still in Gilgal awaiting Samuel, and there, because Samuel has not come after seven days, Saul's army is dwindling, while the Philistines are advancing from Michmash to Gilgal. Saul offers the sacrifice himself. Samuel arrives and castigates Saul for disobedience, declaring that YHWH will take away his kingdom. A transitional line (13:15a) has Saul returning to Gibeah, and when the action picks up again, the Philistines are still in Michmash and the Israelites in Gibeah. The embedding of this episode in the account of the war is facilitated by 7:16–17, cited above, which identifies Gilgal as one of the places where Samuel rode circuit and thus must have had an altar appropriate for sacrifice to which Saul must come.

Gilgal II is the first of two propagandistic passages about Saul's failure and abandonment by YHWH in favor of one to come, that is, David. The probable author is Dtr. The story does not appear to be connected with the kingship inauguration tradition named above as Gilgal I.

(g) *The battles at Michmash (1 Sam 13:2–7a; 15b–23; 14:1–45)*. This complex narrative is analyzed above. Saul's army of three thousand men, which shrinks to six hundred as a result of flight and desertion, is rather different from the numbers of troops in the Ammonite war. The Philistines' main camp is at Michmash, and the Israelites are at Gibeah and Bethel. The narrative units that make up this section are in smooth sequence: Jonathan's

murder of a Philistine official, Philistine retaliation, prebattle sorties, Jonathan's raid, Saul's curse, victory, and the near execution of Jonathan. Only the Gilgal II material and an incident involving the consumption of meat with blood (14:31–35) are intrusive elements. This lengthy and detailed account of battles, individual heroism, and a tragic vow appears to be drawn from a heroic narrative in poetic or prose form.

(h) *Amalek (1 Sam 15)*. The incredible story of the Amalekite war is an anti-Saul polemic, the second to declare that YHWH will take away Saul's kingdom for his disobedience and give it to another. The theme is a doublet of Gilgal II, but the details are completely different. The use of this story serves Dtr's purpose, and the Amalek episode is recalled by the ghost of Samuel in 1 Sam 28, where the phrase about YHWH's "tearing the kingdom away" from Saul (15:28, cf. 28:17) is again cited. Yet the inclusion of poetic fragments suggests that Dtr may have been using a preexistent text. The poetry (15:22–23) about YHWH's preference for obedience over sacrifice may have been imported from a prophetic work not necessarily related to the events. The possibly poetic verses 28–29 on YHWH's tearing away the kingdom are part of the anti-Saul polemic. But 15:33, Samuel's words to the Amalekite king before he cuts him into pieces, appear to be a poetic fragment original to this episode about an Amalekite war. While it is unlikely that the text reflects an actual historical event (see discussion above), the probability is strong that there was a pre-Dtr narrative tradition about the old seer Samuel's falling out with Saul and subsequent support of David (compare Merlin's relationship with Uther Pendragon and Arthur in the Arthurian tradition). The casting of the spirit at Naioth in 1 Sam 19 — which included an etiology of the old saying about Saul being a crazy prophet — would be a part of that tradition. Of course Dtr may have also enhanced the narrative of 1 Sam 15 with his own rhetoric.

(i) *Samuel's farewell speech (1 Sam 12)*. This is another polemic, but one which has the unintentional charm of Samuel's portrait as a bitter, self-righteous leader who has been displaced. It is the longest Deuteronomic interpolation; it attempts to place the establishment of monarchy into the context of Israel's past and future history as interpreted by Dtr.

(j) *Summary of Saul's victories; list of family members (14:46–51)*. This material is a redactional summary, drawn from one or more traditions. On what might underlie the list of victories, see above (p. 122) the discussion of the possible relationship of this passage with 2 Sam 8.

David's Arrival at the Court of Saul (1 Sam 16–18)

Halpern assigns all of 1 Sam 16 to the B source, both Samuel's anointment of David and his recruitment as a musician by Saul. But this chapter can be

further broken down. The story of the anointment (16:1–13) follows either statement of YHWH's rejection of Saul, though its present position makes it the consequence of the Amalek incident. This arrangement is Deuteronomic. The fact that the anointment of David by Samuel is never mentioned again in the story of David might suggest that it was not part of a larger narrative tradition. However, 16:1–13 has details of David's family which appear again in the tale of David and Goliath (the non-LXXB version), so it is possible that the anointment was a component of that story or was worked into it. At all events, the second half of the chapter, 16:14–23, is from a different source which features Saul's evil spirit and a heroic introduction of David that ends with his appointment as Saul's armor bearer.

According to Halpern the David and Goliath tradition is shared by A and B, with each having some version, but the division of verses is uncertain. First Samuel 18–19 is broken up: Jonathan's befriending of David (18:1–5), Saul's offer of Merab (18:14–19), and Saul's casting a spear at David (19:8–10) belong to A. The B source consists of the women's praise of David, another spear cast and David's appointment as a military officer (18:6–13), plus the winning of Michal and Jonathan's intervention with Saul on behalf of David (18:20–19:7), and David's escape with Michal's help followed by the spirit-casting incident at Naioth (19:11–24).

As noted above, my preference is to follow the LXXB/non-LXXB division in defining the sources both in chapters 17–18, where the actual division appears, and in the surrounding material. Thus I would assign 16:14–23 to the same narrative strand as the LXXB material, in which David is known to Saul, but the folk motifs and family details in 16:1–13 probably belong to the non-LXXB stratum. Michal appears only in LXXB in 1 Samuel; David's escape with her aid in chapter 19 comes from the same tradition. Merab and Jonathan appear only in non-LXXB in chapter 18; Jonathan's friendship with David in 19 and later chapters is exclusively part of this tradition. The theme of music therapy for Saul's evil spirit, for which David was recruited and which provides the setting for Saul's spear-throwing, would belong to the tradition represented by LXXB. Indeed McCarter has made a case that 18:10–11, a spear throwing incident in the non-LXXB material, is a redactional addition and not originally part of the non-LXXB stratum. It is out of place in the narrative and duplicates 19:9–10.[77]

David's Escapes and Saul's Pursuit (1 Sam 19–26)

The escape assistance given David by Jonathan and Michal in 1 Sam 19, already discussed, actually begins this section. The next stretch of narrative

77. McCarter, *I Samuel,* 305–6.

from 1 Sam 20 through 24 is assigned by Halpern to the A source: Jonathan's arrow warnings (20), the Nob incident (21–22), David's feigned madness at Gath (21), his taking of Keilah and flight when the residents plan to betray him, another escape when informed on by the Ziphites (23), and the robe-cutting episode in the cave near Ein Gedi (24). The B source then relates the Nabal incident (25) and, after another Ziphite betrayal, David's refusal to kill Saul when he steals into the king's camp and takes his spear (26).

At this point I would abandon a two-source theory (i.e., attempts to continue the LXXB and non-LXXB narratives are hopeless) in favor of a series of poorly connected tales about David's narrow escapes and his cleverness in outwitting Saul. Establishing a chronological or sequential relationship among all of the stories is impossible. Did the Naioth and Nob incidents follow David's escape when he was abetted by Michal or by Jonathan? How many times do the Ziphites inform on David? Are David's confrontations with Saul after the cut robe and the stolen spear different versions within a single tradition or do they come from different, longer sources like Halpern's A and B? I have suggested above that several independent short pieces have been inserted into the general narrative (21:1–16, feigned madness; 22:1–2, Adullam; 22:3–5, parents to Moab), and the story of Nabal and Abigail (25) is difficult to associate with any specific early source, despite the brief addendum about Saul's annulment of David's marriage with Michal, which is a redactional note.

A reference to Jonathan's plotting with David is made in the Nob story (22:8) and could thus tie it to the non-LXXB stratum. The reference, however, comes in the midst of Saul's anger at his men for not being more suspicious of David. He accuses them of plotting for not revealing that Jonathan has covenanted with David and that his son has in essence incited David against him. But Saul knew of Jonathan's support of David in the previous episode, when he attacked him verbally and physically (20:30–33). If 22:8 is a redactional interpolation to artificially connect the Nob story with the Jonathan tradition, then this episode, too, might be considered independent of any larger source. The short account of a meeting between Jonathan and David at Horesh in Ziph (23:16–18) has long been considered a Deuteronomic insertion.

David with the Philistines and the Death of Saul (1 Sam 27–2 Sam 1)

Halpern's A source is limited to Saul's consultation with Samuel's ghost at En Dor (1 Sam 28:3–25) and his death, along with his three sons, in battle, and their eventual burial by the residents of Jabesh Gilead (1 Sam 31). The B source bears the tradition of David as a mercenary of the Philistines: employment by Achish of Gath and operations in the south (27); dismissal from

the war against Saul (28:1–2; 29); rescue of the Ziklag captives (30); and reception of the news about Saul and Jonathan's death at Gilboa, followed by the poem of lamentation (2 Sam 1). Halpern suggests that David's later recognition of the good deed of the Jabesh Gileadites in 2 Sam 2:4–5 is the end of Source B.

The stories about David's mercenary career do appear to be sequential. Halpern considers them the first historical description of David. But why their identification with the B source? It is in Source A's 1 Sam 31 that the men of Jabesh Gilead repay Saul by burying him and his sons, a reflection of the Ammonite war (1 Sam 11), which is in Halpern's B source. There are two versions of Saul's death, but it is difficult to associate them confidently with specific longer sources, though only 2 Sam 1, in both the prose and the cited poem of lamentation, emphasize Jonathan and his relationship with David. It seems best to regard this material as arranged from a collection of originally independent units about David in the employ of the Philistines, like the stories that developed about David's narrow escapes from Saul and his adventures as a fugitive outlaw.

Chapter 8

A Fresh Look at David in the Twenty-first Century

David as King

The previous chapter examined the many narrative units that made up the story of David's rise, ending with the two versions of Saul's death in 1 Sam 31 and 2 Sam 1. The rest of 2 Samuel through 1 Kgs 2 deals with the period of David's kingship, first over Judah and then over all Israel. For the purpose of discussion and analysis, this extensive material is broken down into smaller sections. The first new unit, 2 Sam 2–5, deals with David's reign at Hebron, his war against Saul's heir, and his achievement of rule over all Israel with a capital at Jerusalem. Second Samuel 6 relates the transfer of the ark to Jerusalem. This is an independent unit that continues the earlier story of the captured ark in 1 Sam 4–7. Nathan's prophecy of YHWH's promise to David of an eternal dynasty in 2 Sam 7 is yet another independent unit. Chapters 8 and 10 are accounts of David's military victories and territorial expansion. In between, chapter 9 deals with the fate of Jonathan's son; the story is related to the account of David's extermination of Saul's heirs, which has been relegated to an appendix in 2 Sam 21. The Bathsheba scandal in 2 Sam 11–12 constitutes the next unit. The lengthy account of Absalom's revolt runs from 2 Sam 13 to 20; it is the narrative core of the book and central issue in David's reign. Appendices on the death of Saul's heirs (21), the deeds of David's warriors (21 and 23), poems ascribed to David (22 and 23), and an account of a census and resulting plague (24) finish out the book of 2 Samuel. We return to the chronological account with the end of David's life and the seizure of the kingship by Solomon in 1 Kgs 1–2. The redactor's hand is shown in the overall arrangement, in the cross-references that connect the independent units to earlier and later narratives, in the removal of material to the appendices, in the abbreviation of some of this material, and in the imposition of a *hubris/nemesis* framework on the Bathsheba and Absalom stories.

Halpern and McKenzie, as we have seen, interpret the text as a royal apology stemming from a period that could be anywhere in a time range from the reign of David himself to the late monarchy (McKenzie), or more specifically datable to early in Solomon's reign (Halpern). While Halpern traces two sources for this apology, which he labels A and B, from 1 Sam 8 to 2 Sam 1, he sees only a single source behind the rest of the narrative through 1 Kgs 2, though it has incorporated some independent units. Where these scholars cut through the apology to get at actual history, my approach, while admitting the apologetic nature of the larger framework and some of the details, is to treat most of the episodes in the narrative as based upon heroic literature rather than specific historical events.

King at Hebron (2 Sam 2–5)

David moves to Hebron, where the Judaeans declare him king. Earlier thematic elements are reflected by his consultation with YHWH concerning the move (2 Sam 2:1; cf. 1 Sam 23) and by the added note that he had his wives Ahinoam and Abigail with him (2 Sam 2:2; cf. 1 Sam 27:3). David's first official act is to praise the men of Jabesh Gilead for their burial of Saul and his sons and to suggest to them that with Saul dead, they might consider loyalty to the new king of Judah (2 Sam 2:4b–7). If David's kingship at Hebron is historical, he must have held it with the blessing of the Philistines, who still regarded him as their agent, or as Halpern comments, as a reward for loyalty to them.[1]

The action-filled narrative begins with the determination of a surviving son of Saul, Ishbaal (called mockingly Ishboshet by the text), and of Abner, Saul's old general and real power behind the throne, to maintain their kingdom. Abner confronts the Judaeans, led by Joab, at the pools of Gibeon. He proposes a duel between twelve chosen Benjaminites and an equal number of David's stalwarts; the fight is commemorated by the place name, "Field of Flints (or Knives)" (2:8–16). As a general battle ensues and the Judaeans gain the upper hand, the retreating Abner is pursued by Asahel, the fleet-footed younger brother of Joab and Abishai. In a story of foolhardiness, bravery, and graphic violence the veteran soldier fails to talk the young warrior out of trying to add another notch to his gun and is forced to kill him (2:18–23). Joab and Abishai give chase but are persuaded to call off the pursuit by Abner, who has rallied the fleeing Benjaminites and now asks for a cease fire. As the casualties are counted and buried, it is evident that the public and private issues have not been resolved (2:24–32).

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1. Halpern, *David's Secret Demons*, 296.

The narrative, which began with brief statements about David's and Ishbaal's assumption of kingship, is developed at far greater length through a pair of heroic stories, one an etiological tale of a tournament-like fight, and the second a fateful adventurous confrontation involving central characters, replete with action and dialogue, that sets up a blood feud that will affect later events. The heroic or epic literature in this chapter dominates the account of a war (according to 2 Sam 3:1, it was a long war) that it is merely supposed to illustrate. Nevertheless Halpern thinks that the historicity of the battle of Gibeon "deserves credence," without, of course, the combat between Abner and Asahel, which is the beginning of the royal apologist's invention to shift the blame for Abner's murder onto Joab and away from David.[2]

After an inserted list of David's wives and children (2 Sam 3:2–5) the narrative continues with a falling out of Abner and Ishbaal over Rizpah, a concubine of Saul's whom Abner has taken. Ishbaal complains but is too weak to do anything about it, and Abner not only threatens to defect to David and bring all Israel over to David's side, he sends messengers to David with offers of a treaty. David is willing, but only if Michal is returned to him as part of the rapprochement. This is arranged, and Abner, after speaking to Israelite leaders, comes to Hebron with a delegation of followers. The talks go well, and Abner is dismissed in order to make preparations for the north to accept David as king. Joab, returning victorious from a raid, hears of the meeting and, declaring Abner's visit to be a mission of espionage, summons him to come back to Hebron, where he murders him in revenge for the death of Asahel. David's reaction is not to bemoan the lost opportunity for peace, but to declare his own innocence as he curses Joab and Abishai for the unauthorized assassination (3:29). He orders the people to mourn, recites a poem of lamentation over Abner (3:33–34), and even fasts. We are told that everyone believed that David was innocent in the matter of Abner's death (3:36–37).

McKenzie and Halpern regard David as the mastermind behind the assassination. For McKenzie[3] the entire story of the blood feud between Abner and Asahel's brothers was invented as part of the cover-up that placed the blame on Joab and Abishai. Asahel was one of the Thirty heroic warriors of David (2 Sam 23:24); he could not have been very young, for he must have already made a reputation for himself.[4] David's marriage to Michal at this stage was a political move; the tale of their earlier marriage ("betrothed for

2. Ibid., 306.

3. McKenzie, *King David*, 117–22.

4. Ibid., 121; McKenzie confuses Asahel, named in 23:24, with his brother Abishai, who in 23:18 killed three hundred men in battle.

a hundred Philistine foreskins") referred to in 3:14 was probably not historical. Halpern agrees; reference to the earlier unconsummated betrothal (rather than marriage) is a way to justify David's claim to Saul's daughter which obfuscates what really occurred. Neither Ishbaal's weakness with regard to Abner nor his willingness to deliver Michal are historical. He would not have "connived with Abner at his own dethronement."[5] Halpern's reconstruction of events[6] is as follows: Ishbaal initiated the contact, seeking to detach David from his Philistine benefactors. David would submit to Ishbaal's authority in return for special status, in the form of marriage with Michal. David's loyalty and break with his former employers would be demonstrated by the gift of Philistine foreskins. But "David's ruthless slaughter of the guests at a peace conference" proclaimed that he would rather defeat and replace Saul's dynasty than become its vassal.[7] The princess Michal's fate, of course, was to languish in the harem without having children, that is, Saulide heirs (2 Sam 6).

Both McKenzie and Halpern have subjected the biblical narrative to their historical criticism, which sees the text as an intentionally distorted historical account. But let us observe the material from a different perspective. Behind this narrative is a rich tradition of stories that have battles, sex, revenge, treason, and murder. The heroic confrontation of Abner and Asahel has vivid action and dialogue. Abner's relations with Rizpah recall Reuben's with his father Jacob's concubine Bilhah (35:22) and, more to the point but more hypothetical, David's possible seduction of Saul's wife Ahinoam. The latter, too, ended in the protagonist's defection to the cuckold's enemies. We may also compare Achilles' refusal to fight for the Greeks after Agamemnon took a woman from him (*Iliad,* Book I) and Lancelot's departure from Arthur's army after his dalliance with Guinevere. Abner's act of *hubris* and Ishbaal's rash response ultimately led to tragedy for the kingdom, as did Saul's overreaction to what he thought was David's ambition. Joab's character, and by implication Abishai's, are defined here (3:39, "the sons of Zeruiah are too hard for me"). This stereotype is maintained throughout 2 Samuel. The pattern of David's response is also established: to curse Joab for his "hard" deeds but not to punish him in a meaningful way. David's protestation of weakness, even though he is king, in contrast to Joab's hardness (3:39) ends the story with a parallel of its beginning — a king who cannot control the military chief who is his major supporter.

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5. Halpern, *David's Secret Demons,* 84.
6. Ibid., 84, 308.
7. Ibid., 308.

The apologist, a contemporary, a later dynastic propagandist, or Dtr, who is my preference, has framed the story in David's favor. The war against the house of Saul was going well (3:1). The desire among the Israelites to abandon Ishbaal and to recognize David's rule and his selection by YHWH to deliver Israel from the Philistines was present even before Abner's decision to turn traitor (3:17–18). Declarations of David's innocence are indeed overdone. David piously mourns Abner and recites a poetic lament, as he did in the death of Saul and Jonathan. The poetic lament, not attributed to any source such as the Scroll of Yashar by the text, is another indication that the organizer of the fixed legend or Dtr was using and reshaping earlier heroic literary works. Inclusion of an excerpt of the lament, as in the case of other quoted poetic passages, would indicate that time had elapsed between the period in which the events are set and the development of a written poetic work available for citation by an apologist. It is far more likely that the redactor/apologist was Dtr than a writer from the time of the united monarchy.

The assassination of Ishbaal by two of his officers named Baanah and Rekab, brothers from Beerot, follows soon after Abner's death (2 Sam 4). An apparent redactional reference to resentment by the Beerotites for their forcible relocation to Gittaim, where "they live until this day" (4:3) provides a motive for the murderers. They bring David Ishbaal's head. In a repeat of the motif from 2 Sam 1, David has the killers executed and dismembered for killing "a righteous man in his bed" (4:11). McKenzie and Halpern agree that David engineered Ishbaal's assassination, "commissioned the hit," in Halpern's words,[8] while the present text exonerates him from involvement. While the narrative is brief, a detail about the killer's gaining entrance to Ishbaal's quarters by delivering wheat (4:6) — or as in LXX, by tiptoeing past a woman at the door who had dozed off — indicates that the redactor has abbreviated a more complex tale. Compare, for example, the interesting and more detailed description of Ehud's assassination of the Moabite king Eglon in Judg 3, where we read of Ehud's ruse to get a private audience with the king, his concealed weapon, the gory thrust, and the crafty escape.

In the midst of this story is a note about Jonathan's young son, Mephibaal (Mephiboshet): At the news of the death of Saul and Jonathan the nurse fled with the five-year-old, but in their haste he fell and became lame (4:4). Mephiboshet does not appear until later in the account of David's reign, but the redactor wishes to remind us here that at least one Saulide still remained after Ishbaal's death.

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8. McKenzie, *King David,* 125–26; Halpern, *David's Secret Demons,* 82.

David's elevation to king of all Israel is related by a series of short pieces in 2 Sam 5. All the tribes come to Hebron claiming they had always supported David from the days he had led them in battle under Saul. They want him to be their *nagid*. Their elders make a covenant with David and anoint him as their king (5:1–3). Halpern makes much of the contractual nature of Israelite kingship,[9] but this passage referring to a covenant is more likely a late summary by Dtr, not a contemporary account, and thus not an accurate report of the political structures of the tenth century. The following verses (5:4–5) are another late comment stating the length of David's reign first in Hebron and then in Jerusalem. The total of forty years is too schematic for comfort. The reference to Jerusalem then leads into the brief tale of the capture of the Jebusite town (5:6–9), which features an unclear etiology of a saying about the blind and lame not being allowed to enter the house and an even more obscure reference to a *ṣinnor* (a passageway?).

One might have expected a longer and more dramatic account of the seizure of Jerusalem, a fort which became "the city of David," his capital (5:7, 9). Again, the vague details in the text suggest the existence of a larger tradition, but we do not know why Dtr abbreviated it. The report that David proceeded to build (a residential area?) around the fort (5:9) has been discussed in chapter 6, with reference to a parallel from the life of Deioces in Herodotus.

Another brief notice states that Hiram of Tyre sent architects, craftsmen, and building materials to erect a palace for David (5:11), sandwiched between Deuteronomic comments (verses 10 and 12) that David's success was attributable to YHWH's support. A list of children born to David at Jerusalem is appended (5:13–16).

In contrast to the short account of the taking of Jerusalem, we now have the somewhat longer stories, but still brief, of a war with the Philistines involving two battles in which David defeated his foes from Geba to the outskirts of Gezer (5:17–25). The introduction (5:17) makes these battles a Philistine response to David's new kingship over Israel. The Philistines operate both times in the Valley of Rephaim near Jerusalem; but Jerusalem itself is not mentioned, only David's retreat to the *meṣudah*, the stronghold, as Jerusalem was described in 5:9. There is some confusion here. In his flight from Saul, David was often at some kind of *meṣudah* (1 Sam 22, 23). In the heroic story of 2 Sam 23:13–17, in which three of David's warriors sneak into Philistine-held Bethlehem to get David a drink of water from the local well, David is said to be either at the cave of Adullam while the Philistines are in the Valley of Rephaim (23:13) or at the unnamed *meṣudah* when the

9. Halpern, *David's Secret Demons*, 297.

Philistines are in Bethlehem (23:14). To return to 2 Sam 5, David consults YHWH's oracle before each action, as he did in the series of escapes from Saul in 1 Sam 23. The first of these (2 Sam 5:19–21) involves an etiological story about the name of the site, Baal-Perazim, and the capture of idols left behind by the Philistines in their flight. The second (5:22–25) features an attack from the rear at the sound of marching or wind in the baca trees or in the asherahs of Bekaim,[10] however the unclear Hebrew is to be translated.

To what part of David's career do these stories really belong? Are they descriptions of real battles or fanciful etiologies and heroic tales? Dtr has placed them so that they represent David's achievement of independence from the Philistines after his coronation and capture of Jerusalem, but there is no telling from where in the tradition they are drawn or how much they have been abbreviated. They are the only illustrations of the war in which David cleared the Philistines out of an area from Geba to Gezer, but the scene of both battles is the Valley of Rephaim near Jerusalem; neither takes place anywhere near Geba or Gezer. The style, with the inclusion of etiological and oracular material, differs from the summaries of military campaigns in 2 Sam 8 (discussion below). In their current form the battles of 2 Sam 5 also differ from the tales of 2 Sam 21 and 23 in that they relate the victories of David and his forces, not the deeds of individual heroes.

The account of David's reign at Hebron is an arrangement of numerous longer and shorter pieces of different genres, including heroic battlefield confrontations, etiologies, oracular tales, and poetry, plus redactional comments and narrative links. This collection of mixed elements would appear to indicate a late arrangement rather than one made for an apology contemporary with David or Solomon.

Consolidation of Power: Extermination of the Saulides (2 Sam 21:1–14; 9:1–13; 6:20–23)

Kings who usurped power had to defend themselves against future revolts by members of the previous ruling house. David was no different in the traditions handed down about his reign, but for Dtr the material about the elimination of the Saulides would be embarrassing if David was to be presented as virtuous in terms of Deuteronomistic morality. Dtr inserted two parts of the least unsavory material into the main narrative, but he had to relegate the most important but damaging section to an appendix, where he gave it religious and political justification.

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10. MT reads "the sound of marching in the treetops of the bekaim"; McCarter, *II Samuel,* 152, suggests "wind in the asherahs" based on LXX mss. readings.

Second Samuel 21:1 and 14b bracket the story of the execution of Saul's descendants by explaining that there was a famine in the land that resulted from Saul's blood guilt, and that the action taken satisfied God so that he granted the land relief. Saul, the text says, had violated ancient treaties in a genocidal attack on the Gibeonites because they were not of Israelite blood. When asked by David how the crime could be rectified, the Gibeonites called for their execution of ten of Saul's male heirs at Gibeah, Saul's hometown. David agreed, and handed over to them Armoni and Mephibaal (Mephiboshet), the two sons of Saul's concubine Rizpah, and five sons of Merab, Saul's daughter, who was married to Adriel son of Barzillai of Meholah in Gilead. Rizpah guarded the impaled bodies of the victims so that no birds or animals could come near — the same theme is found in Sophocles' *Antigone* — until David allowed the bones to be buried in a family grave, together with the remains of Saul and Jonathan, which he had exhumed from Jabesh Gilead for reburial.

Modern scholars have recognized in this account a pretext for David's elimination of Saul's heirs in a way that absolved him from base motivations in the killings. The sudden need to cleanse the land of this blood guilt, years after Saul's death, was very convenient; David is even portrayed as a champion of justice. Halpern regards Israelite resentment of David for this transparent massacre as a major factor in the revolts against David later in his reign.[11]

Within this text Dtr has placed a note that David spared Jonathan's son Mephibaal because he had sworn to Jonathan that he would deal kindly with his family (21:7). Thus Dtr relates the Gibeonite episode to the relationship between David and Jonathan earlier in the main narrative and to an episode that is yet to come. The judicial killing of the Saulides belongs chronologically to traditions about the early years of David's reign; the continuation of this account is the story of Mephibaal and Ziba in 2 Sam 9.

Jonathan's lame son, Mephibaal (he had the same name as Rizpah's son; it was popular in the family), was first introduced in the misplaced verse, 2 Sam 4:4. Now, in a text that can only follow the killings by the Gibeonites, David inquires if any more of Saul's descendants are left to whom he can show kindness (9:1). Mephibaal had found sanctuary with Machir son of Ammiel of Lo Debar in Gilead. David has him brought to court to reside at the king's expense. Saul's property is transferred to Mephibaal's ownership, and Ziba, a former official of Saul, is assigned to be its caretaker along with his fifteen sons and twenty servants. This passage is not vital to the narrative

11. Halpern, *David's Secret Demons*, 370 and elsewhere.

at this point, but it introduces Mephibaal and Ziba, who will play a role later on.

Halpern reads Mephibaal's status at David's court as that of a hostage, which is a reasonable inference from the background circumstances, and suggests that Ziba's stewardship involved kickbacks to the royal house,[12] which is not a reasonable inference. Halpern thus makes David not only a serial killer, but also a corrupt taker of graft. He believes that David's seeming generosity to surviving Saulides like Mephibaal is probably historical, but, as noted in the previous chapter, that the close relationship between Jonathan and David in both the A and B sources is not historical, only inferred by the authors of those sources from David's later treatment of Mephibaal.[13]

The last passage relevant to our present topic is 2 Sam 6:14–16, 20–23. David has brought the ark to Jerusalem, and after a great celebration all the people have gone home (6:1–19). In the course of the ark procession David had stripped off his clothes and done a frenzied dance, much to the embarrassment of his wife, Saul's daughter Michal (6:16). Now, when the party is over, Michal castigates her husband for exposing himself to the lowliest women in the population. David reminds her that he has replaced her father as king and can do as he wishes. He will have no child with her, apparently demoting her to a life of chastity in the harem as a "living widow," as such women are later called in 20:3. The effect is that there will be no royal offspring from the line of Saul.

The transfer of the ark to Jerusalem is probably an independent story into which Michal has been placed. I doubt that an official royal apology would have included the intimate conversation between Michal and David, or even that a failure to produce a child through Michal would have required an excuse. David was, after all, fruitful through his other wives. But in the tradition Michal was David's first wife, and as Saul's daughter, she must have been his primary wife, a position she resumed after her restoration to him. McCarter suggests that 6:14–16, 20–23 comes from an old text and was inserted here by Dtr as an "editorial junction" to connect the previous narrative with what was to follow.[14] I would offer that this old text was a romantic tradition that explained why she never had children; a tale that makes David an unrestrained enthusiast and Michal a snooty shrew is a charming way to do it. Dtr even added a touch of religious spirituality to

12. Ibid., 341ff.
13. Ibid., 283, 369.
14. McCarter, *II Samuel,* 184–89.

David's dancing before YHWH (6:14 and 21) and noted that it was YHWH who made David king in Saul's place (6:21).

Bathsheba and Uriah (2 Sam 11–12)

In 2 Samuel, as the book as a whole is constructed, the story of David's abuse of power through lust and murder is the pivotal element in his adult life. In Dtr's telling the episode of David and Bathsheba reveals the *hubris* that made the setbacks of David's subsequent career acts of *nemesis*. The beauty of Bathsheba, Uriah's stubbornness, and Joab's complicity are only a few details in a wonderfully crafted story. There is irony: Uriah is sent against the enemy in order to be killed, just as Saul once intended for David. Joab, previously cursed by David, is now his henchman in crime. At the end of the story Joab makes certain that David receives credit for the fall of Rabbat Ammon, even though the reader knows the king has been dallying in Jerusalem while the soldiers have been at the front.

The intervention of Nathan with his parable of protest and his declaration that "You are the man!" is a literary masterpiece. His prediction that evil will arise for David in his own house and that someone else will lie with David's wives in public (12:11–12) is really the only direct link with what is to come in 2 Samuel; it is probably the only clearly redactional passage in the story along with the announcement of Solomon's birth (12:24–25), extraneous to the present story but important in anticipating Israel's next king.[15]

"When the time of the year that kings go out to war came around," David sent Joab and the army against Ammon (2 Sam 11:1). That is how the story begins. The previous chapter, 2 Sam 10, had described a war against the Ammonites and their Aramean allies, whose continuation is the backdrop for chapters 11–12. But 11:1 appears to introduce a new story. As for the aftermath of 11–12, we hear nothing of Bathsheba and Solomon again until the succession controversy of 1 Kgs 1. The story of the seduction of Bathsheba and the murder of Uriah stands on its own, connected to the Absalom material only by Nathan's prophecy about David's wives, which is not even recalled at the point when it is fulfilled in 16:21–23.

As noted above in chapters 2 and 7, Van Seters detached the story from Dtr's collection of pieces on David. Since it does not conform to Dtr's idealized picture of David, it must be a late post-Dtr addition that challenged the growing image of David as messianic model. McKenzie also regards 2 Sam 11–12 as secondary. It was not in David's apology, nor was it in Dtr's history; it was a later addition, part of the stratum that turned the entire story

15. See ibid., 308.

of David into a lesson of reward and punishment.[16] Be that as it may, the events behind the tale were historical! Only they occurred not before Absalom's revolt, but afterwards, late in David's reign. Thus Nathan's prophecy can allude to Absalom's rape of David's concubines in 2 Sam 16, which had already happened. In McKenzie's view the historical cover-up of the sexual affair began with an attempt to get Uriah into bed with his wife. When that failed, Uriah was sent back to the front unknowingly carrying a message ordering Joab to arrange for his death; but before that could be set up, Uriah died a soldier's death in battle because of a tactical military blunder on Joab's part, which Joab covered up. The cover-ups failed, and the affair became common knowledge before Nathan's intervention.[17]

Halpern's theory, briefly described above in chapter 7, is far more complicated and perhaps far-fetched. Because it involves the historical revolt of Absalom and its aftermath, and because Halpern attributes the royal apology to Solomon rather than to David, it is best left for examination below under the heading of Solomon's rise to power. As for relevance to the present context, Halpern argues that David's criminal deeds in 2 Sam 11–12 are a big lie, concocted by Solomon in order to prove his own status as David's son. David is innocent of something, for a change. See below for how the details fit the theory.

From my perspective, we must determine the nature of the narrative unit before it was used for any editorial purpose. All of 2 Sam 11–12, except for the two redactional passages already identified, appears to be an integrated literary unit, written perhaps more skillfully and artistically than previously examined material. It is, as I have said, a tale of lust and murder, and the hubristic abuse of power by a king who, to save his own reputation, has a loyal warrior whom he has wronged killed. But the deed is exposed and David suffers for it. The woman and the capital of Ammon are his, but the child is dead. Such a story, including the juicy details, certainly was not found in royal annals and makes no sense at all as an apology. But in its present form, whether based on a folk tradition or on a more sophisticated literary antecedent, it is a polished literary creation, perhaps by genre a novella. Dtr found it as a component of the "fixed legend," the canon of stories that formed the David tradition.

Like the Greek plays that dramatized and moralized the legends of heroes, the story of David, Bathsheba, and Uriah is a self-contained literary unit that has its own tragic outcome for the perpetrators of the crime.

16. McKenzie, *King David,* 34–35.
17. Ibid., 157–60.

Dtr has connected it to the cycle of Absalom stories through Nathan's prediction, so that punishment for David's crime takes the form of a long-term curse upon his family. It is not impossible that the historical David was a womanizer, but the private details about the liaison, the dialogue between David and Uriah, the secret message to Joab, and the way Uriah died would have left no historical record. Against the argument that while the details may be fictional, the basic story might be true, we must point out that when virtually all of the parts are based on artistic creativity, the whole can hardly be regarded as historical.

The supposition that the story is a post-Dtr addition is based on too narrow a view of Dtr's literary skills. While the Bathsheba affair does not reflect well on David's character, Dtr has no trouble defining its context. First, 1 Kgs 15:5 makes David the model king who followed YHWH's commandments "all his days, except in the matter of Uriah the Hittite." The sin is admitted in a way that does the least damage, limiting it to a single spot on David's image as the ideal king. Second, David confesses his crime and Nathan reports that YHWH will not apply the death penalty to him (2 Sam 12:13). Then David prays passionately but unsuccessfully for the life of his son. Third, the larger narrative is arranged as a series of woes suffered by David as punishment for his hubristic acts, thus constituting a pattern that is elsewhere characteristic of Dtr and which serves Dtr's theodicy.

David and Absalom (2 Sam 13–20)

The core issue and greatest challenge for David's kingship was the revolt of his son Absalom, which nearly cost him his throne. The interrelated events of the story take us from Absalom's revenge for the dishonor done to his sister, through his exile, return, and eventual reconciliation with David, the revolt itself, its suppression and Absalom's death, and finally, the crushing of a second revolt by Sheba son of Bichri. From Rost to McKenzie and Halpern, modern scholars have accepted the historicity of the narrative's outline and many of its details, whether they considered it an elaborated Court or Succession History that began with Bathsheba's seduction and culminated in Solomon's enthronement, or a chapter in David's or Solomon's royal apology. What makes the story so vivid, however, is not the main narrative line but its component scenes which feature a variety of interesting characters and physical and emotional conflicts. That these were all brought together to form a memorable whole is a testament to the writer's skill. When the present text of 2 Samuel took shape, the details were related to people, events, and themes outside the story itself, probably by Dtr. That gives it the so-called ring of truth, but it can also be simply a good job of literary integration.

McKenzie's work is interesting for both his direct interpretation of the text and his reliance on speculation.[18] The biblical text, that is, the apology, portrays David as a gentle person throughout the story. He does not punish Amnon for raping his half-sister, allows Absalom to return from Geshur and eventually accepts him, turns a blind eye to Absalom's ambitions, humbly abandons Jerusalem and flees, refrains from killing Shimei, and issues orders that Absalom not be slain. Blame for the things that go wrong is placed instead on his rash sons and harsh generals, Joab and Abishai. In McKenzie's historical reconstruction the context of Absalom's revolt is dissatisfaction with David's rule, especially among the northerners, who were being treated as a conquered population. The Benjaminites in particular resented the loss of Saul's dynasty and the murder of his heirs. So far, that may be inferred from the text. But McKenzie continues: David had a hand in the murder of Amnon, whom he suspected of treason. As the son of Ahinoam, Amnon may have been the last of those connected to Saul. After the murder Absalom was sent by David to Geshur "for safekeeping and for appearance's sake"; no punishment was contemplated, and he returned when the excitement over the revenge killing abated. The text describes Absalom's open courtship of supporters and overt gestures of authority. In reality, says McKenzie, he plotted secretly; otherwise his movement would have been squelched early on. As David had done, he won the backing of the Judaeans at Hebron. He also was able to take as his advisor Ahitophel, the grandfather of Bathsheba who nursed a grudge against David since the affair of his granddaughter and the death of Uriah. (McKenzie is here inconsistent, since elsewhere he has argued that the Bathsheba affair happened after Absalom's revolt.)[19] Ahitophel's military advice was rejected in favor of the double agent Hushai's. But Hushai does not appear again; McKenzie thinks it "likely" that he was unmasked and executed. David certainly ordered Absalom's death, for Joab was not punished for the deed. It would have made no sense for David to appoint Amasa commander of the army; that never happened. David actually had the former enemy general — who was also the resentful son of Nabal and Abigail — executed through the same *modus operandi* and the same agency that snuffed out Abner.

Halpern is more interested in the political reality behind the stories than in personalities, but his interpretation also is a mixture of logical inference and guesswork. David's limited hegemony over the north was possible only after the Ammonite war. At that point he was able to make demands on Israel, with the collaboration of Gileadites like Machir of Lo Debar and

18. The following is a summary of McKenzie, *King David,* 155, 161–69.
19. See n. 17, this chapter.

Barzillai of Rogelim. The defection of Machir and Barzillai from their former loyalties to Saul may be seen in their tolerance of David's removal of Mephiboshet from Machir's care and of the killing of the Saulides, among whom were Barzillai's grandsons.[20] During Absalom's revolt they were David's allies. The core of Absalom's supporters were Judaeans apparently unhappy with David. He took Jerusalem with an army based in Hebron, and the Hebronite Amasa was his military commander. Courtiers such as Ahitophel deserted to him. After the coup, Absalom invited the northerners to join him as allies, not subjects. Absalom promised them independence, which raised Mephibaal's hopes in 2 Sam 16, vengeance for the death of the Saulides, and an end to the close relationships between Judah and "foreigners" like the Philistines, Tyrians, and Ammonites to the detriment of Israel. The north had always had nativist sensitivities, and Absalom exploited them. In the end David's professional army, which included Ittai's Gittite mercenaries, defeated Absalom's tribal levies and subsequently crushed Sheba's rebellion. It is possible that destruction layers in places like Megiddo, Dan, Bet Shan, and Yoqneam are the results of these wars. These victories gave David complete control of the north for the first time. The somewhat confusing material in 2 Sam 19 about the competition between Judah and Israel to greet David and restore him to his throne reflects an official reelection of David (Halpern understands kingship as contractual) and recognition of his kingship over all Judah and Israel.[21]

McKenzie's and Halpern's reconstruction of personal motives and hard-nosed politics may be overanalysis. The story fits together like a good historical novel, perhaps because that is what it is — not a Court History or a Succession History, but a drama of conflict between father and son. In the story Absalom's murder of his half-brother Amnon is justifiable, since the king had taken no action with regard to the rape of Tamar. But Absalom has killed the heir apparent and is banished. The impetuous but wronged son returns, aided by Joab's belief that his presence would be good for David, only to be snubbed by his father. We see later that David really loves him but does not know how to act toward him even after Joab has contrived a reconciliation. Although Absalom openly affects the trappings of power and builds a following, David seems to be caught by surprise, certainly unprepared, for his son's coup, and he flees rather than attempting to take a stand in Jerusalem. Fully alert now, even in flight David begins to plan for his restoration by organizing a spy network and a way to counter the sage counsel of Ahitophel by placing a mole in Absalom's circle of advisors. On

20. Halpern, *David's Secret Demons,* 343, 365.
21. Ibid., 365–80.

one side, Absalom unleashes his pent-up contempt for his father by following Ahitophel's advice and publicly raping David's concubines; on the other side David displays his pent-up affection for his son by ordering that Absalom not be killed in the final battle and by grieving profusely at the report of his death.

Literary devices abound. Joab's ploy to recall Absalom from Geshur through the woman of Tekoa's invented legal plea (2 Sam 14) duplicates Nathan's method of accusing David in the matter of Bathsheba and Uriah (2 Sam 12). David's response includes a command that not a single hair of the person to be pardoned shall fall to the ground (14:11). McKenzie points out that the manner of Absalom's death, swinging by his hair suspended from a tree, fulfills David's order as if it were a prediction.[22] Absalom's innocence, flight, return, and usurpation parallel David's own rise. David's powers of discerning the significance of people's behavior repeatedly fail him, and he is often fooled by what he is told: for example, in the matters of Amnon's illness, Absalom's seemingly innocent sheep-shearing party, the rumor that all the king's sons have been slain, the woman of Tekoa's story, and Absalom's assumption of authority. Personal feelings lead to blunders: the politically misguided order to preserve Absalom's life, and the equally misguided appointment of Amasa as army commander. Halpern regards this recurrent theme as the apologist's way of distancing David from responsibility in a number of killings.[23] But it may also be a creative writer's explanation of how things got so out of hand. David is too distracted to pay attention to details, and this flaw almost costs him his kingdom. It is the astute Joab who must intervene three times to bring the unwilling David to his senses.

In addition to Joab and the woman of Tekoa there are other interesting supporting characters and subplots. Some episodes are related in full detail, as Amnon's rape of Tamar, Absalom's complaint to Joab after gaining his attention by burning his field, the conflicting advice of Ahitophel and Hushai, the final battle and unusual death of Absalom, and the stylized scene in which messengers bring the news to David. We might ask about the seemingly more extensive background traditions of some of the characters. Amnon's companion, Jonadab son of Shim'ah, David's brother, "a very wise man," appears in 13:3–5, where he advises Amnon to feign illness in order to get close to Tamar, for whom he lusts. Jonadab appears once more in 13:32–36 to deny a rumor that Absalom has killed all the king's sons; he tells David that only Amnon is dead. Are there other traditions about this courtier and cousin of David, or is he merely a useful device for the David

22. McKenzie, *King David,* 164.
23. Halpern, *David's Secret Demons,* 362.

and Absalom story? Who were Ahitophel the Gilonite ("David's counsel," 15:12) and Hushai the Archite ("the friend of David," 15:37) before they appear in our text? Had they been royal advisors of long standing in the traditions about David, or are they characters invented for the present story to which they add a touch of intrigue? A comment in 16:23 says that in his role as counselor to David and Absalom Ahitophel's advice was considered equal to a consultation with God. If Ahitophel was really Bathsheba's grandfather, no mention is made of it here, and no motive is given for his defection to Absalom in 15:12. Another newcomer is Ittai the Gittite, who had arrived at David's court "only yesterday" leading a troop of six hundred Gittites (15:18–22). This Ittai is described as an exile from Gath. He joins David in his flight from Absalom and later is given command of part of David's army along with Joab and Abishai in the battle against Absalom (18:2). What was his background? Is he identical with Ittai son of Ribai from Gibeah, one of the Thirty warriors of David (23:29)? It is surprising that he, too, does not appear after the Absalom story; even in the war against Sheba, Joab and Abishai have military commands, but Ittai is nowhere to be found.

Other characters are present who are not unique to the story of David and Absalom. David's eastern allies are mentioned by name (17:27; see above, chap. 6): Shobi son of Nahash from Rabbat Ammon, Machir son of Ammiel from Lo Debar, and Barzillai the Gileadite from Rogelim. Shobi must have been a brother of Hanun son of Nahash (2 Sam 10) whom David defeated and most likely deposed in favor of a more pliant sibling. We have met Machir, the former host of Mephibaal, and Barzillai, the father-in-law of Merab, before, but only as names. Now they provide supplies for David's troops after his flight from Absalom. Only Barzillai is mentioned again. In 2 Sam 19:32ff., after the victory over Absalom, he is invited to David's court in Jerusalem. He begs off, citing his age, but requests that Kimham, presumably his son or ward, join David's retinue instead. David agrees and promises to treat him well. Kimham then is the only individual specifically named who accompanies David to Gilgal for the reestablishment of his rule (19:41). But we hear nothing of him again, perhaps because Dtr's narrative of David's kingship virtually ends with the aftermath of Absalom's revolt. In this case it is not Kimham's past that arouses interest, but his subsequent activities; for why name him if he were to play no role in the traditions about David's court? In 1 Kgs 2:7 David recommends to his successor Solomon that Barzillai and his sons be rewarded and continue to be part of the king's retinue.

Does the David and Absalom story end with David's reaction to his son's death, or are the subsequent events part of the same literary package? The text of 2 Samuel, after the report of David's unwise mourning for Absalom described in 19:1–9, abandons the longer dramatic scenes for a series

of shorter ones in 2 Sam 19 and 20 which tie up some loose ends from the previous account: David's return to his palace (19:11–13, 41–44); Amasa's appointment as military commander (19:14); Shimei's second reprieve from death at the hands of Abishai (19:16–24); Mephibaal's punishment by the diminution of his estate, half of which is granted to Ziba (19:25–31); Barzillai's reward via Kimham (19:32–41); Amasa's murder by Joab (20:7–13). The story of Sheba's revolt and its suppression (20:1–22) may also fall into this category, since it continues the activities of the rebellious northerners who had joined Absalom and is linked to the previous war by David's remark to Abishai that Sheba's rebellion is potentially more dangerous than Absalom's (20:6). It also follows up on the career of Amasa by providing the setting for his death at the hands of Joab.

It is difficult to say whether all this material was originally part of the dramatic and emotion-filled tale of David and Absalom. I have included it in the discussion because much of it is linked to details of the previous narrative. But were those details in the original Absalom story? The earlier accounts of Mephibaal's treasonous hopes (16:1–4), Shimei's cursing of David (16:5–13), and the aid given by the eastern allies (17:27) may be artificial additions. They are irrelevant to the main narrative line of tragic conflict between father and son. Even Absalom's appointment of Amasa as his commander (17:25) is suspicious, for in the account of the battle that follows, his name never comes up. That the text has interpolations is clear from 18:18, when, after the description of Absalom's death and burial in a forest pit, we are given the information that while Absalom was alive he erected a stele in the Valley of the King in order to commemorate himself, since he had no children. The stele is called "the Monument of Absalom until this day." This is an obvious etiological addition that is not even connected to the narrative. Worse still, Absalom had been said to be the father of three sons and a beautiful daughter named Tamar (14:21) in a passage that may itself be an interpolation at that point.

Where there are some discernible interpolations, there may be others not so easily identified. Second Samuel 13–20 is probably Dtr's mixture of several traditions about politics, allies, and battles with the dramatic tale of David and Absalom. While the narrative that includes all this may be a reflection of historical circumstances, that is, a real civil war between David and his son, I would caution against an attempt to reconstruct history through this material. We could, on the other hand, identify the tale of David and Absalom as a major element of the Davidic literary tradition, and we could guess at the background of the stories that have been worked into it.

The uprising of Sheba son of Bichri has so many interesting details that it must have originally stood on its own as a separate tradition. His call to

arms is treated as a famous slogan (20:1). The text exaggerates by relating that "all Israel" joined Sheba, and that the ensuing activities produced a civil war, since the Judaeans supported David (20:2). In the rest of the narrative Sheba is portrayed as more of a nuisance, the leader of a small band that finds refuge behind the walls of Abel. The "rebellion" is really the vehicle for two traditions which together constitute virtually the entire story. The first is Joab's murder of Amasa, whom David appointed to lead a Judaean force against Sheba (20:4–13). The second is the siege of Abel, in which a local woman persuades Joab to spare the city by inciting the residents to cut off Sheba's head (20:14–22). The details differ, but the story has similarities to Judg 9, where Abimelech, another self-proclaimed leader with not much of a constituency, is killed at the hands of a woman.

The focus of 2 Sam 20 is on Joab, one of the great figures of the David traditions. In the war with Absalom Joab has again acted in David's interest but against his wishes. He had Absalom killed and then rebuked David for mourning the traitor. David demoted Joab and appointed Amasa in his place as military chief. Now David sends Amasa to gather a levy of Judaeans and put down Sheba's revolt. His failure to muster soldiers quickly leads David to give Abishai the assignment of catching Sheba with a smaller but more effective force made up of the elite warriors and the royal guard of mercenaries based in Jerusalem, and "Joab's men" (20:7) from the regular army. Amasa finally joins them and is promptly murdered in graphic detail by Joab personally with one sword thrust. This act does not faze the soldiers; they follow Joab, who joins his brother Abishai at the head of the troops.

In the overall context of the story, Amasa had served Absalom, but David had given him a high appointment as a gesture of reconciliation with the Judaeans who had supported Absalom, and as punishment of Joab — for offending the king by being right. Amasa's murder, done for Joab's own benefit, is the assassination of Abner all over, with Joab again retaining his position as military commander. In the context of the previous chapter Joab's deed would have also jeopardized David's peace policy, as had the death of Abner; but this is not stated in the text. Also unstated is that David appears to have acquiesced to Joab's reinstatement with the army's blessing. Only in 1 Kgs 2:5 does David bring up both assassinations, urging Solomon to have Joab eliminated. But in the present story the focus is only on Joab.

In the second episode of Sheba's revolt Joab is shown, by contrast, as a wise general who negotiates with a woman and spares a city which is "a mother in Israel" (20:19). Abishai does not appear in this tale, only Joab. It looks as if Sheba is almost incidental to both components of the narrative about his revolt. They are traditions about Joab, his cleverness and ruthlessness, and his thematic tendency to guard jealously his position

of military chief while ultimately acting in the best interests of his king and country.

The action-filled and ultimately tragic novella of David and Absalom appears to run from 2 Sam 13 to 19:9, with relatively few intrusive elements from separate traditions. I use the term "novella" in the sense of Jason's categories of folk literature: It is a genre of the realistic mode, defined as "A tale in prose or verse (rare) in which man confronts his fellow man in wisdom, cleverness, morality, foolishness, or cruelty. The novella is set in the historical period and in space" [i.e., not in a mythical or fantastic time and locale].[24] The conflict of David and Absalom is narrated in distinct dramatic scenes and introduces a variety of characters who themselves are associated with traditions of their own outside the novella along with other characters who might have such associations in traditions that are no longer extant. It has a unified plot which features tension, a climax, and a denouement. The story may have arisen from historical events, but it may also be, like the tale of Arthur and Mordred, a tradition-based fictional literary creation.

Solomon's Coup d'État (1 Kgs 1–2)

The vivid picture in 1 Kgs 1–2 of David's senility and the struggle of Adonijah and Solomon to succeed him is in some ways so realistic that the temptation to regard it as an accurate historical account is not surprising. David does not come off well. Though impotent, he still likes pretty young women to share his bed and keep him warm. A new concubine, Abishag, is found for this purpose. David seems to be oblivious to the jockeying for position going on around him. His officials have taken sides. The old guard — Joab and Abiathar, veterans of David's outlaw days — support Adonijah, perhaps hoping to keep their positions as army commander and high priest under a new king. Solomon is backed by the relative newcomers, known only from the period of David's kingship: Nathan the prophet, Benaiah the chief of the praetorian guard, and Zadok the priest. The impression given by that high-powered lineup is that the real struggle is between the respective groups of supporters, and that the princes are the vehicles through which they hope to keep or take over the top jobs in the kingdom. A preemptive declaration of kingship by Adonijah is negated by Nathan and Bathsheba's successful attempt to hoodwink the king into naming Solomon as his heir, and by the quick action of Benaiah's mercenary guards to protect Solomon and have him anointed by Nathan and Zadok. Even more "realistic" is the Machiavellian advice David gives Solomon before his death: to secure his throne by eliminating not only his own rivals but David's old enemies as

24. Jason, *Ethnopoetics*, 48.

well. And so, in short order, Adonijah, Joab, and Shimei are executed and Abiathar is retired.

But the story doesn't stand up to criticism. The selection of Abishag after a nationwide search has elements of the search for a musician to expel Saul's evil spirit (1 Sam 16) and the stereotypical beauty contest that made Esther queen of Persia. The real reason for the introduction of Abishag is the passive role she will play in the demise of Adonijah after David's death. With Solomon on the throne, Adonijah, giving up all claims to rule, only wants the beautiful Abishag. But she was a royal concubine, and Adonijah's request is interpreted by Solomon as treason — an excuse for Adonijah's execution. Nathan's recruitment of Bathsheba to convince David that he really had promised to make Solomon king is a fanciful story. First Kings 2:3–4 is a Deuteronomistic sermon about obeying YHWH's commands inserted into David's dying advice to Solomon. The entire story is a transparent justification of Solomon's seizure of the throne and ruthless (though normal for usurpers) elimination of rivals and opponents.

This apology, of course, must be for Solomon's deeds, whether produced by his scribes or by a later writer like Dtr. It draws on certain features of the material about David in 2 Samuel for which it is to appear as a continuation. David's randiness, even in his dotage, is not out of keeping with his roguishness in 1 and 2 Samuel. His deathbed advice refers to the misdeeds of Joab and Shimei from the previous narrative, but unaccountably — unless senility or sheer revenge is the reason — he now suggests that Solomon execute men whom he has kept alive, and in Joab's case has maintained in a high position, all this time. This is no apology for David, but it uses David's vindictiveness as an excuse for Solomon's ruthless but prudent elimination of potential problems.

McKenzie regards the text as an apology for Solomon much along the same lines. For him the plot of Nathan and Bathsheba is fiction, and most of the allegedly historical details are implausible or senseless. However, the image of Bathsheba as a co-conspirator leads him to speculate that she was a strong, calculating woman who may not only have been involved in her son's coup, but may have connived at grasping power from the beginning, initiating the sexy incident in which David got her pregnant and working for Solomon's benefit ever since.[25]

Bathsheba figures prominently in Halpern's theory as well, but the argument is far more complex.[26] Solomon's name means "replacement," that is, of his dead father Uriah. He actually was the son of Uriah and Bathsheba,

25. McKenzie, *King David,* 178–83.
26. Halpern, *David's Secret Demons,* 371, 387, 396–406.

insists Halpern, and his pedigree was well known while he was growing up in the royal court. He was not a danger to anyone's ambitions because he was not a son of David and had no conventional chance to be his heir. That is how he survived Absalom's temporary rule, and that is why his grandfather Ahitophel could serve Absalom without a conflict of interest. Or perhaps Absalom won Ahitophel to his side by preferable treatment of Solomon and Bathsheba. When Solomon seized power he had to justify his right to the throne; it is from his palace that the royal apology was issued that put David in a favorable light and established his own legitimacy. For that he had to become David's son. While insisting on David's innocence in a series of murders and other crimes that David had actually committed, Solomon's apology nevertheless made David guilty of a crime he never committed — the murder of Uriah the Hittite. The invented sequence of events was as follows: David impregnated Bathsheba, Uriah was killed, the infant died, and Bathsheba conceived again, giving birth to Solomon. Thus Uriah could not have been Solomon's father; it must have been David. The report that the first infant died as punishment for David's crime was to preclude rumors that Solomon was not David's bastard but Uriah's child by an already pregnant Bathsheba. In the bigger picture of the apology, divine punishment for David's seduction of Bathsheba and murder of Uriah ensued in the form of violence within the royal family, Absalom's temporary ouster of his father, and his rape of David's wives on Ahitophel's advice, a fulfillment of Nathan's prophecy.

When David returned to power, in Halpern's reconstruction, Bathsheba began conspiring to elevate her son to the throne, and she was a participant in his coup. Solomon's rule and elimination of David's old guard would be her revenge for the deaths of her protector Absalom and her grandfather — and most likely of her father as well, who would not have escaped David's punishment for his father's and/or his own association with the rebels. Adonijah had not invited Solomon along with the other sons of the king to his celebration (1 Kgs 1) because Solomon was not a son of the king, but a Hittite. Solomon's apology demonstrated that he was really David's legitimate son, the designated heir who would set the damaged kingdom back on track. By portraying Bathsheba as the widow of a murdered military hero, the apology may even have intended to win the sympathy and support of the army for her son, all the while insulating her from any blame. Halpern sees her behind the apology: " . . . it is Bathsheba's voice that we hear, though the hand be the hand of Solomon."[27]

27. Ibid., 406.

Such propaganda was insufficient, Halpern continues, especially for those who knew the truth, so it had to be reinforced by political action. Solomon got rid of David's old officials, rewarded those who supported him (e.g., two sons of Nathan were given administrative appointments, 1 Kgs 4:5), and made overtures toward reconciliation with David's opposition — the faction of Absalom. He married his son, the prince Rehoboam, to Maakah, a daughter of Absalom (1 Kgs 15:2, 10). The foreign mercenaries, that is, the Cerethites, Pelethites, and Gittites, disappear from the biblical text during his reign, perhaps disbanded as a concession to the nativism of the northern Israelites. The Israelites would participate in the first stages of Solomon's temple-building program; subsequently only Canaanites did the corvee labor (1 Kgs 5:27–30; cf. 1 Kgs 9:20–22).

In sum, Halpern reads 1 Kgs 1–2 as the end of a royal apology issued by Solomon that legitimized David's takeover of Saul's kingdom and his own seizure of the throne over Adonijah's better claim. To do this he had to accuse David of Uriah's murder, even though he consistently absolved David from criminality in every other instance.

The text of 1 Samuel–1 Kgs 2 is clearly tendentious and some of it at least is fiction. None of this stops McKenzie and Halpern from sheer speculation about real historical events and personalities because they regard the text as actual evidence from the period of the events themselves. Halpern especially builds upon a series of assumptions and conjectures to develop a scenario for the Bathsheba story which some might call bizarre. For McKenzie 1–2 Samuel is an apology from late in David's reign or later, and 1 Kgs 1–2 is Solomonic propaganda. All of it is Solomon's apology according to Halpern. But aren't there easier ways for kings to glorify their deeds and whitewash their faults? Simple boasting about accomplishments and rewriting failures as successes on stelae works as apology for most ancient rulers. Lengthy stories with dialogue and personal details, some unsavory and some embarrassing, would not be the medium of choice. Would rulers portray themselves and their predecessors as thugs and adulterers, or as kings who could not control their underlings? Surely Gyges (see above, chap. 6) of Lydia would not have presented himself the way Herodotus, Nicolaus of Damascus, and others described him years or centuries later — through different versions of legends and folk tales that made him an adulterer, regicide, and usurper. The stories about David are similar, and they make the most sense not as contemporary apology but as an organized collection of tales which have been edited and given propagandistic spin long after the time in which the actions they describe are set. If the stories have the *characteristics* of legends, folk tales, and literary development, sometimes in several versions, plus an editorial bias, then that is what they probably *are* — legends and folk tales

which have undergone literary development and have been arranged in an editorial framework. To reverse the editorial bias may help to reconstruct the original tales, but not to reconstruct history.

The Added Units

In addition to the main narrative about David's life there are several independent pieces that have been worked into the running account or added at the end. The former have been integrated into the narrative by the redactor, while some of the latter had been parts of the earlier narrative but were abbreviated and relocated to the end as appendices.

Transfer of the Ark to Jerusalem: Ark Narrative, Part II (2 Sam 6)

Together with the story of the capture of the ark in battle by the Philistines and its return (1 Sam 4:1–7:1), the story of the ark's transfer to Jerusalem by David in 2 Sam 6 has been regarded since Rost as a separate unit usually called the Ark Narrative. As noted above, the section dealing with David's rejection of Michal (6:14–16, 20–23) is from another tradition, added here by Dtr. The Ark Narrative is often dated early, for example, from David's reign by McCarter, Solomon's by Fohrer (see above, chap. 2). The debate about its literary unity and its genre(s) has been most interesting. There are narrative details that would seem to indicate that the 2 Samuel story picks up where the 1 Samuel tale left off, but there are linguistic considerations, including names of people and places, that would suggest separate stories. Seen as a single account, a typical tale of the victors' capture of the losers' gods or icons is followed by a typical account (cf. Mesopotamian models) of the return of divine images after a period of capture or exile. McCarter prefers two narratives, one dealing with the capture of the ark by the Philistines and its return, composed before David's eventual defeat of the Philistines, and the second an account of the introduction of a new cult into the royal city — not adapted from a description of an annual procession — after David had established his independence from the Philistines, probably drawn from David's annals.[28]

The ark is mentioned again in 2 Sam 7 (see below) in the context of Nathan's covenant prophecy, a late Deuteronomic addition, and in the story of Absalom's revolt in 2 Sam 15:24–37. In the latter passage, the priests Zadok and Abiathar have taken the ark from its place to bring it along on David's flight from Jerusalem (with a Deuteronomic addition in v. 24 that has Levites carrying it). David, however, orders them to take it back and

28. See discussion in McCarter, *II Samuel,* 178–84.

remain in the city with their sons to constitute, along with Hushai, an espionage cell. The priests and the ark are thus part of the David and Absalom narrative, which assumes the presence of the ark in Jerusalem. If so, perhaps the account of the ark's transfer in 2 Sam 6 was indeed part of the old traditions about David's establishment of a royal center in Jerusalem. On the other hand, the first stage of the ark's transfer (6:3–8) is the etiological story of how a site came to be called "Perez Uzzah until this day," an independent narrative. Another strange aspect of 2 Sam 6 is the noninvolvement of the priest Abiathar (and Zadok, if he was already serving as priest at the time), an omission which would appear to separate this text from other parts of the David tradition. In 2 Sam 6 David himself conducts the procession and offers the sacrifices.

The latest studies of David's career have included inferences drawn from the ark's prior location. McKenzie, going back to Eli, Samuel, and Shiloh, regards the ark, symbolic of YHWH's presence, as an Ephraimite institution. David's decision to bring it to his capital was a gesture of respect for the northerners' traditions and a statement that their god also was behind his success. It must have caused resentment among the Judaeans and been one of the factors leading to their support of Absalom.[29]

Halpern argues that the real seat of the ark was the area of Gibeon, not Ephraim. In 1 Sam 6–7:2 the ark was returned by the Philistines to Bet Shemesh, but YHWH's attack on the residents for looking at the ark made them pass it on to Kiryat Yearim, where it was brought to the house of Abinadab and his son Elazar. When David decides to transfer the ark he gets it from the house of Abinadab in Baalei Yehudah, or Baalah, another name for Kiryat Yearim (Josh 15:9). When the transfer is halted because of the death of Uzzah for touching the ark, it is housed for three months with Obed Edom, a Gittite, until it is safe for David to conduct it to Jerusalem. Kiryat Yearim was one of the four cities of the Gibeonites, along with Gibeon, Kephirah, and Beerot (Josh 9:17), inhabited by a Canaanite group that had, according to Joshua 9, a treaty arrangement with the Israelites. Here is the ark's original location. The enduring sanctity of the region is indicated by the great sacrifice that Solomon offered on the high place at Gibeon, where YHWH appeared to him in a dream and granted his wish for wisdom (1 Kgs 3:4–15).

The ark's iconography, with its cherubs, was based on Egyptian motifs, not surprising since the names of Moses and his family, as well as those of Eli's sons, were Egyptian. By contrast, Halpern argues, the iconography of the Israelite shrine was the bull calf. David, in effect, adopted the ark, which

29. McKenzie, *King David,* 135.

had been associated with Gibeon, as a state symbol.[30] The Gibeonites, who furnished the ark, were thus David's allies. Two brothers from Gibeonite Beerot, a town whose population had been expelled when Saul annexed it to Benjamin, assassinated Ishbaal and brought his head to David (2 Sam 4:2–3, 5ff.). Another Beerotite is in the list of David's Thirty warriors; he was Joab's armor bearer (23:37). David handed over seven descendants of Saul to the Gibeonites for execution, citing a previously undescribed attack (presumably it is what the expulsion from Beerot refers to) by Saul on the Gibeonite population in violation of the ancient treaty (2 Sam 21). Halpern suggests that the attack reflects Saul's and northern Israel's nativist policies.

Furthermore, the Philistines had close ties with the Gibeonites. They returned the ark ultimately to their territory. A Gittite, Obed Edom, lived at Kiryat Yearim and provided a place for the ark on its interrupted journey to Jerusalem. David worked for the Philistines as a Gittite mercenary, and Ittai the Gittite became one of David's military commanders (2 Sam 15, 18). In Saul's time the Philistines had a governor, and thus a garrison, at Gibeah (1 Sam 13), which is very near to the Gibeonite towns. (Is the Ittai son of Ribai of Gibeah, one of the Thirty from 2 Sam 23:29, identical with Ittai the Gittite?) Halpern sees David and his Bethlehemites, the Philistines, and the Gibeonites as a closely allied group. No wonder that a major battle between David's and Ishbaal's forces was fought at Gibeon (2 Sam 2).[31]

Halpern's reconstruction is brilliant if the Ark Narratives in 1 and 2 Samuel are early representations of historical events or even later literary pieces which recall actual historical circumstances. If, however, as I suspect, they are merely expansions of etiological material in the Ark Narratives (Ichabod, a custom of the temple of Dagon, Joshua's Field, Perez Uzzah), which is a strong possibility, then they are of doubtful historical value, and political history can hardly be derived from them.

The Davidic Covenant (2 Sam 7)

The covenant YHWH makes with David through Nathan's prophecy followed by David's prayer in 2 Sam 7 is justificatory propaganda for the legitimacy of David by divine choice, the selection of Solomon to build the temple, and the continuation of the dynasty by divine promise. The text has been pulled apart by scholars past and present who have assigned all or parts of it to David's public relations effort, to Solomon, to later kings of the dynasty, to a prophetic supplement, and to Dtr. I do not intend to summarize

30. Halpern, *David's Secret Demons*, 289–93.
31. Ibid., 310–13, 370.

all the possibilities. In any case, this material does not belong to the narrative traditions about David; it is the official line of the Judaean monarchy and its Deuteronomic historian, reflected also in prophetic literature and in Psalms.

The promise has been worked into the narrative of 2 Samuel by simple placement after David's capture of Jerusalem and transfer of the ark to the new capital. "When the king dwelt in his house and YHWH had given him rest from his enemies round about" (7:1) is the simple introduction. Now that the ark is in Jerusalem — which is implied but not stated — David wants to build a house for YHWH to dwell in (2–3). The response is that first, YHWH doesn't need or want a permanent dwelling (4–7), and that second, a contradictory statement, his son is to build it (12–13). The second part of the response cannot be from a time before the temple was actually constructed. Next, the promise that the dynasty will endure even though one of its members may do wrong and suffer (divine) chastisement through human agency (14–16) may come from a later period yet. Dtr, if he was not the actual author, put it all together to explain why, in his account of the monarchy, David did not build the temple, Solomon did, and the dynasty did not collapse despite the punishment of a particular king (Solomon again?). The last item is in contrast to Saul, whose disobedience doomed his dynasty (15).

David's Military Successes (2 Sam 8, 10)

Second Samuel 8 is a catalogue of David's conquests: Philistines, Moabites, Arameans, and Edomites, followed by a list of royal officials which is not related to the military victories. The narratives that go with the military campaigns are brief, often no more than a verse long. David defeated the Philistines and took Meteg Haamah (8:1). After smiting the Moabites he executed two thirds of the captives and enslaved the rest (2). He defeated Hadadezer son of Rehov, king of Zobah when he went to restore his stele at the river (3). Captive soldiers and equipment are enumerated (4). David then defeated Arameans from Damascus who came to the aid of Hadadezer; the number of casualties he inflicted is given (5). David placed prefects in Aram and received tribute (6). He brought golden shields taken from Hadadezer's men to Jerusalem and much bronze from towns Hadadezer controlled (7–8). Toi of Hamath sent his son to David with vessels of gold, silver, and bronze to ask for peace, since Hadadezer was also Toi's enemy, and David added the gifts to the other tribute from Aram, Moab, Ammon, the Philistines, Amalek, and Hadadezer that he dedicated to YHWH (9–12). He set up a monument (lit., made himself a name) and defeated the Edomites (following the LXX

reading) in the Valley of Salt, then appointed governors and subjugated Edom (13–14).

This text differs in style from the more detailed battle narratives of the David tradition. The most relevant comparison is with 2 Sam 10, an account of victories at the beginning of the war against Ammon. The end of that confrontation, the siege of Rabbah, is left for 2 Sam 11–12, where it is the backdrop for the affair of David, Bathsheba, and Uriah. Chapter 10 gives a full account of the origins of the conflict. David has sent envoys to bring condolences to Hanun, the new king of Ammon, for the death of his father Nahash, with whom David had friendly relations. The envoys are treated as spies and sent home humiliated, with half their beards shaven off and their garments cropped (10:1–5). Fearing reprisals, the Ammonites call upon the Arameans from the house of Rehov and Zobah, as well as Maakah and Tob for assistance (6). David sends out his army under Joab, who divides his forces between himself and Abishai, one column to go against the Ammonites, the other against the Arameans; both are victorious. The Ammonites retreat to their city, and Joab leads his army back to Jerusalem (7–14). The Arameans, however, are not through. They summon allies from beyond the Euphrates and present a new enlarged force under Hadadezer and his general Shobak. David himself leads out an army drawn from all Israel and defeats the Arameans at Helam, killing seven thousand horsemen and forty thousand (a textual error?) charioteers, and Shobak as well. The Arameans submit to David and provide no more assistance to the Ammonites (15–19).

Aside from the comparatively inflated casualty statistics — the figures in 2 Sam 8 are lower but also inflated — the style of 2 Sam 10 is completely different from that of chapter 8. Second Samuel 10 gives us motives, personalities, the names of leaders, and tactics, much like the account of the battle against Absalom in 2 Sam 18. Second Samuel 8 is a catalogue; 10 is anecdotal narrative. But in the instance of the Aramean war they are probably referring to the same events and involve the same people. The Hadadezer son of Rehov, king of Zobah in 2 Sam 8 is represented by 2 Sam 10's House of Rehov and Aram Zobah. Hadadezer's allies from Damascus in chapter 8 are paralleled by the Arameans from beyond the Euphrates in chapter 10.

The most compelling and best-argued interpretation in Halpern's new work is one he already presented in a previous publication of 1996: that 2 Sam 8 is based on a "display inscription," a conventional text through which Middle Assyrian kings like Tiglat-Pileser I summarized their accomplishments.[32] With some exaggeration about territory conquered, casualties

32. Ibid., 112ff.; "The Construction of the Davidic State" (1996). See discussion above, chap. 5.

inflicted, loot taken, and tribute extorted, the display inscription provides a topical — not necessarily chronological — list of major successes. The reference to a monument in 8:3 (and possibly in 8:13) may point to the use of precisely such conventional ways of advertising by an Israelite king. If so, 2 Sam 8 may be a real historical source from David's reign, either a copy of his display inscription or a text based on it. It would present us with facts, exaggerated, but still basic facts without anecdotal details or literary expansions.

Not only is 2 Sam 8 stylistically different from other war accounts, such as 2 Sam 10, it also differs from the brief list of Saul's victories in 1 Sam 14:46–48, which gives only the names of his enemies and no other details at all. What is interesting is that the names on the lists are parallel: Philistines, Moab, Ammon, Edom, Zobah, Amalek. This may be a standard group, comprising all of the peoples that surrounded Israel on the east, west, north, and south. There are no Canaanites. They had been vanquished, according to Dtr. David took Jerusalem from the Jebusites, but 2 Sam 8 is interested only in his foreign conquests which expanded his borders and influence. The coastal Canaanites in Tyre and Sidon are not mentioned because they were not hostile, and David is described as being on good terms with Tyre. Within the narrative framework of Saul's life and times as presented by the rest of 1 Samuel, campaigns by Saul in the south against Moab and Edom and in the north against Zobah seem highly unlikely; there are certainly no relevant accounts preserved about such exploits. As discussed in chapter 7 above, the war against Amalek (1 Sam 15) is probably fictional as well.

It is possible that Dtr wanted to make a summary statement about Saul's military accomplishments and provided a nonhistorical standard list of Israel's enemies. Perhaps the list is drawn from David's summary in 2 Sam 8 and applied to Saul, though it is strange that Dtr, who consistently belittled Saul in favor of David, would suddenly credit him with more than he actually achieved. I suggested above the remote possibility that perhaps Saul was indeed the founder of a strong kingdom that won many victories, and that when David usurped the kingship he took the credit for some of Saul's successes — a display inscription would be a good way to do it — or that Dtr transferred such credit. Saul's name and perhaps his birth story, after all, were assigned to Samuel in Dtr's account, and David's killing of Goliath is a usurpation of Elhanan's heroic deed.

A series of great victories by Saul rather than David does not fit our understanding of the course of history of the early monarchy; but to cite an argument of the minimalists, our understanding of Israel's history is based on Dtr's account, which we know to have manipulated several traditions in favor of David and to the detriment of Saul, who is pictured mainly as

a foil for David. Who knows what traditions about Saul's and Jonathan's heroic deeds circulated in Israel, especially in the north? Did Dtr ignore or suppress any? After Solomon, the kingdom of Israel outshone Judah for two centuries. Perhaps it was built on a foundation that had been laid before David's time.

My position has been that most of the material about the age of Saul and David comes from a developing set of folk and literary traditions. Halpern's argument that 2 Sam 8 may be the text of a display inscription magnifying the deeds of the king on a stele erected as a memorial, or at least may be based on such an inscription, is, however, very persuasive, if we also consider a third option that it might be a contrived account written in the style of a display inscription. In either case the writer of the biblical text would have changed the typical first-person format of the royal inscription to a third-person narrative.[33] Second Samuel 8, then, is the closest candidate for a contemporary source we have, perhaps the only one. Whether or not it really is a contemporary source is unprovable, and whether it reveals events accurately or distorts them is another question altogether. Furthermore, even if the text were to reflect a real inscription, it is only a list of conquests that can tell us nothing about any other detail of the lengthy story of David in 1–2 Samuel. If there were a royal apology, an inscription would be its most likely medium. But 2 Sam 8 is a royal boast about conquests, not an apology concerning sensitive details from the king's personal life, which would hardly appear on a display inscription.

Census and Plague (2 Sam 24)

Second Samuel 24 is a most difficult text. It has been placed at the end of the book as an appendix most likely because David's construction of an altar on the threshing floor of Araunah, which he purchased (24:18–25), marks the spot where a tradition found in 2 Chr 3:1 says the temple was built. This designation of the temple's location is not found in 1 Kings, an indication that there was post-Dtr editorial work on 2 Samuel. The story itself offers no clue as to its chronological position in David's career, only that it took place after David gained control over all Israel.

For unknown reasons YHWH was angry at Israel, not David (24:1). Ultimately, the punishment would be through disease, that is, God's hand, but the excuse for it had to be a human sin. YHWH pushes David into ordering a census of men of military age in all of Israel and Judah. A census is fraught

33. See discussion in E. Greenstein's review of Damrosch, *The Narrative Covenant,* in *Prooftexts* 8 (1988): 349. Damrosch's main theme is the transformation of genres in biblical narrative.

with taboos; Joab warns David against carrying it out (another example of Joab's acting in David's interest against his wishes), but he grudgingly does his job, counting 1,300,000 eligible men, 800,000 Israelites and 500,000 Judaeans (2–9). A remorseful David admits his sin and seeks corrective measures. The prophet Gad gives David a choice of expiatory punishments: a seven-year famine, three months of military losses, or three days of disease throughout the nation. David takes his chances with the disease (10–14). Finally, after 70,000 deaths, YHWH stops the destroying angel in Jerusalem at the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite. David confesses his sole guilt; the people are innocent (15–17). On Gad's instructions David purchases Araunah's property, erects an altar and offers sacrifices, and thus halts the plague (18–25).

We are still ignorant of Israel's sin, the cause for YHWH's anger. The numbers of people counted in the census and the number of plague victims are incredibly exaggerated. There is no other reference to the story in Samuel–Kings. While David admits his sin in ordering the census (2 Sam 24:10), Dtr's statement in 1 Kgs 15:5 about David's perfection except in the matter of Uriah ignores this episode.

A parallel to the full text of 2 Sam 24 appears in 1 Chr 21. Usually, it is fairly clear that Chronicles copies material from Dtr and revises it, through omissions, additions, and other changes, to bring the narrative in line with theological, legal, and political concerns of the late Persian period. This process is very obvious in the full story of David, where Chronicles omits all the material that might make David appear less than an ideal king. There is no outlaw period or civil war; upon YHWH's rejection of Saul all Israel comes to proclaim David king. There is no affair of Bathsheba and Uriah, no family violence, no revolt of Absalom, and no struggle for succession during David's senile old age. On the other hand the support given David by all Israel is expanded, and David is made responsible for drawing up the plans for the temple that Solomon would build. Yet the story of the census is included.

Chronicles' version begins differently. It is Satan, the deceiver and provocateur, who incites David to conduct a census (1 Chr 21:1). While this detail may be written off as a whitewash of YHWH's action in this matter, with the substitution, the story makes much more sense. We need not search for an elusive sin of Israel that angered YHWH and conflicts with David's confession of sole guilt. The census numbers in 1 Chr 21:5 are more specific — 1,100,000 Israelites and 470,000 Judaeans — than the rounded numbers in 2 Sam 24. Gad is called David's seer (1 Chr 21:9); in 2 Sam 24:11 he is "the prophet, David's seer," with the explanatory term. The angel instructs Gad about the altar at Araunah's threshing floor in 1 Chr 21:18; in 1 Sam 24:18 the instructions are Gad's alone.

It would appear in this instance that the version of Chronicles is prior to that of 2 Samuel, which has eliminated Satan and given the angel a lesser role, rounded off the census numbers, and explained that the seer was a prophet (as in 1 Sam 9:9 with reference to Samuel). The strange episode of the census, which doesn't fit anywhere in 2 Samuel's narrative, was most likely a creation of the Persian period when the etiology for the location of Solomon's temple was of propagandistic importance. (Second Chronicles 3:1 identifies the site of Ornan's [Araunah's] threshing floor with Mount Moriah, the scene of Abraham's binding of Isaac in Gen 22.) The story, with minor changes, was then added to 2 Samuel as an appendix. If correct, this analysis is further demonstration that 1–2 Samuel was still undergoing redactional activity late in the Persian period.

The Deeds of David's Heroic Warriors (2 Sam 21:15–22; 23:8–39)

The abbreviated summaries and fragments of stories about heroic acts and the list of David's Thirty elite warriors were what initially propelled me into an investigation of other folkloric material in 1–2 Samuel. These heroic passages are often dismissed as tall tales. However, scholars who read the story of David as real history need sources contemporary with David and/or Solomon, and the insistence that the list of heroes comes from an early archival source serves their purpose. I have attempted to demonstrate that the heroic texts are more likely the product of extensive literary development, often from a legendary or folkloric base, to a more complex literary tradition. What we have in 2 Sam 21 and 23 are just abbreviated references to stories which must have been known in more extensive versions by Dtr and his readers. Their presence hints at the probability that other stories that appear in the text in longer form are also literary developments from legends and folk tales, and not historical evidence.

I have given extensive space to the discussion of this material above in chapters 3 through 6, and throughout this work. There is no need to reiterate here.

The Appended Poems (2 Sam 22 and 23:1–7)

The two poems which have been added to 2 Samuel reveal nothing about David or the Davidic tradition other than the development of a belief, apparent in the introductory lines of several psalms, that David was a poet who wrote psalms. Second Samuel 22 is Psalm 18, included in 2 Samuel and ascribed to David "on the day YHWH rescued him from all his enemies and from Saul" (22:1). Just as the second chapter of Jonah was not necessarily recited by someone who was in the belly of a fish, this psalm of thanksgiving for YHWH's deliverance need not pertain only to David's

precarious position. One line catches my attention (verse 6a): "the bonds of Sheol encircled me." Vocalized *ša'ul* instead of *še'ol,* the reference could be applied to David and Saul by the early exegete who inserted the psalm into 2 Samuel. No matter how one dates the psalm, it clearly was added as an afterthought, probably after Dtr.

The second poem (23:1–7) pretends to be "The last words of David son of Jesse / the utterance of the man raised up, / the anointed of the God of Jacob, / and the favorite of the strength (or sweet singer) of Israel" (23:1). Only a reference to an eternal covenant with "my house" (23:5) evokes a Davidic tradition, that is, 2 Sam 7.

Like the tale of the census, the poems are late additions. They enhance David's mystique by making him a religious poet, an image that has endured in legend and art, as the biblical text likes to say, "until this day."

Chapter 9

Last Words

All modern critical readers acknowledge that in its present form the Deuteronomic history of Israel is a post-586 product, though many believe that much of it may have been composed in the generation before the exile, during the reign of Josiah. Dtr reaches back to Israel's prehistory: the exodus from Egypt, the Israelite takeover of central Canaan, and the period of tribal autonomy, some six hundred years to four hundred years before the Babylonian exile. It is generally assumed that when monarchical governments developed in Israel and Judah, their bureaucracies kept records which were available to the compilers/authors/redactors we associate with Dtr. But what about the stage between prehistory and bureaucratic monarchy? The transitional age of Saul, David, and Solomon, that is, the "united monarchy," was roughly four hundred years before Dtr. Its historicity has been the subject of major disagreements in recent years. More important to this study is whether or not documentary evidence from this period survived to be employed by Dtr, and if so, of what sort it was. If the early "monarchy" was really just a small chiefdom, as some archaeologists and historians maintain, and not a fully organized state or small empire, then could it support scribal activity capable of producing royal records and literary works?

Two issues pertaining to the united monarchy require emphasis. First, four hundred years between events and the narrative literature about them is a long time. That is recognized by everyone, but many scholars do not sufficiently appreciate what that can do to the transmission of information. Accounts can become distorted intentionally or unintentionally, details can be lost, and legendary elements can be mixed in with historical descriptions. Perhaps a basic chronological framework can emerge even from such distortions if the time span between the events and the text is relatively short; but after four hundred years the narrative framework itself must be suspect, especially when the late texts in question show clear signs of tendentious editing.

The second issue involves the nature of Dtr's documentary material about the age of Saul and David, regardless of its early or late date. The

presence or absence of scribes is not really the core question. The leaders of even small towns and chiefdoms had to correspond with each other; witness the Amarna Letters of the fourteenth century. Individuals with scribal training could always be found for this purpose, for creating statements for the public to be inscribed on walls or stelae, and, if the state was politically mature, for keeping annalistic records. No Israelite clay tablets bearing royal correspondence or annals and no royal inscriptions from the tenth century are extant. What might have been preserved in 1–2 Samuel? Except for a catalogue of David's military successes in 2 Sam 8, which *might* reflect the text of a stele, virtually all of what we read in Dtr about the early monarchy consists of a series of stories, parts of stories, or references to stories about the lives of Samuel, Saul, David, and characters who surrounded them. The stories, short, long, crude, and artistically developed, relate deeds of adventure and passion, and often contain scenes with private dialogue. Some heroic tales involve exotic elements and exaggerations, while others are more realistic in tone. In some cases the same tale is told in two versions. This collection of stories does not constitute royal annals typical of the ancient Near East; annals do not use such material.

If not royal annals, was there another literary vehicle from David's time that may have preserved historical data? Recent studies have advanced the theory that 1 Samuel–1 Kings 2 represents a royal apology, a document through which David and/or Solomon justified their questionable deeds in the face of popular resentment or opposition. But the use of stories, often concerning intimate acts, appears to be an alien way to produce an apology. There are indeed extant ancient models of apologetic literature. For David's self-justification we should expect an inscription that begins something like this:

> I, David son of Jesse, King of Judah and Israel, beloved by YHWH, reigned in Hebron for seven years and in Jerusalem for thirty years, established a place for the ark of YHWH in Jerusalem, and conquered the enemies of my people. . . .

The inscription might then state that YHWH had helped him defeat his foes and had given him the kingdom of Saul. To counter the charge of usurpation the inscription might say that Saul had been killed in battle after failing to oust the Philistines, and that David, by contrast, had succeeded in driving them out of Israel from Geba to Gezer. And so forth. There would be no need to include a legendary duel in which David usurped the role of another famous warrior, or to relate a series of narrow escapes from Saul, one with the help of his wife. It would be counterproductive to make public a detailed

account of his own crimes of adultery and murder, and it would be embarrassing to admit the rape of his harem by his own son. Absalom's rebellion might indeed be mentioned in the context of David's crushing all uprisings against him.

Could David, like Idrimi of Alalakh, have inscribed an autobiographical account of his life on the occasion of turning over power to his son? Such an inscription might say that he had been unfairly relieved of his command and driven from his home by Saul, but after being forced to live as an outlaw and mercenary, he had returned, with Philistine and Judaean support, to win the throne of Ishbaal. The military and political successes of his reign would follow — something like 2 Sam 8 — with an addition that he had suppressed a rebellion by his own son. Much more would not fit on a stele.

But the material we have about David's career consists of some thirty-eight biblical chapters, the bulk of which have detailed narratives and dialogue. This is not material produced by royal scribes for public consumption, propaganda, biography, or otherwise. Who would read it? It can only be a collection of stories and tales that accrued over a long period of time. While some of the units follow each other in a way that might indicate that they formed longer narratives, others clearly stand on their own. These may be etiological tales, quoted poems, alternate versions of a single story, episodes that are linked to others only by painful redactional manipulation, or self-contained narratives with full plot lines that have their own resolutions. Among the ways to identify independent narratives is to judge whether or not they can be read by themselves after introductory lines like "Once it happened that while David was at Saul's court playing his lyre . . . "; "On one of those occasions when Saul tried to kill David . . . "; "Once, when Saul was chasing David . . . "; "Once, when the Philistines came out for war . . . "; or "When it was the season for armies to go to war, and David was in his palace at Jerusalem. . . . "

Furthermore, some passages in the text are plainly fragments of incomplete stories. What is the rest of the tradition, for example, about the sword of Goliath, a weapon that had no peer according to David's declaration upon receiving it for his personal use? Dtr has apparently decided to use only a part of this tradition. There are also abbreviations or summaries of longer tales whose details are lost. Their presence in the text and the placement of some of them (the heroic deeds of David's warriors) in an appendix at the end of the book indicate that Dtr found more literature on David than he wanted to use in his account. Dtr had to find a place for the additional material, albeit in summary form, because it was part of an existing canon of traditions about David and his companions. On the basis of internal evidence and by comparison with other systems of heroic literature, I have

argued that the legend of David, or cycle of stories and poems, must have been "fixed" into such a canon before the time of Dtr.

The Deuteronomist had religious and political messages that shaped his entire history. Except for a few identifiable passages such as Samuel's speeches, the account of David's life and times in 1–2 Samuel is remarkably free of Dtr's religious polemic against worship of any deity but YHWH, and major insertions concerning the legitimacy and chosenness of David and his dynasty are also limited. Nevertheless, one can see Dtr's hand throughout, putting David's career in as favorable a light as possible and legitimizing his rule. The effort is fairly transparent, and one can see through it to recover what was probably the form of the traditions that Dtr found. What is revealed is not the history or propaganda of David and Solomon, but a collection of literary traditions about the golden age of Israel's early kings. Some of these traditions may have originated during or shortly after David's time, but most may represent folk tales and legends that arose later, or secondary literary development of both the earlier and later creations.

While not evidence for the historical reconstruction of the early monarchy and the life of David, these traditions are far from worthless. They represent the popular literature through which residents of Judah and/or Israel understood and celebrated the past, much in the way that the Homeric epics informed the culture of ancient Greece. Heroic stories and poems about David and his warriors were a major component of Judaean culture during the monarchical period. The kingdom of Israel probably had its own traditions about Saul. For Judah, David became paradigmatic of royal leadership — a talented soldier and clever statesman who did not shrink from deceit and cruelty when these were called for. In the popular literature there was no need to apologize for David's amorality or his temporary weakness in the face of his son's revolt. Such faults and their consequences enhanced the dramatic effect of the literature.

For an image of the ideal future king the popular culture did not require political propaganda about the promise YHWH had made to David or the prophetic description of a shoot or branch from his royal line. The growing body of folk tales, legends, and novellae of the David tradition produced its own image of him as a model ruler. It was not that of a pious singer of psalms or of a wise shepherd of his people. This David was in his youth a bold, clever, and ambitious scrapper who went after what he wanted, power and women included, and who was capable of calculated violence. Those qualities won him a kingdom and allowed him to expand it. The mature David possessed the same qualities, until they temporarily deserted him when he was faced with the hatred of a man who was a copy of himself, his son Absalom.

It seems to be customary that the book jackets of works about David sport the picture of Michelangelo's noble sculpture of the idealized subject. So also the new volumes of McKenzie and Halpern. The image of David in the popular traditions behind Samuel–Kings calls instead for brashness and sensuality, best portrayed by Donatello's bronze David in the Bargello Museum, Florence. David stands over the severed head of Goliath in sensual contrapposto, one hand holding Goliath's sword and the other casually on his hip. His hair is long and his youthful nude body is slim and not heavily muscled. The look on his face is the epitome of smugness. "That wasn't hard," he appears to be saying. "What's my next move?"

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